

Why We Lack Self-Insight

How well do you know yourself? Want to know yourself better?

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There are psychological reasons why we don't know ourselves as well as we think we do. Here are some of them.

Actor-Observer Bias. This very fundamental bias in perception states that when we try to explain why we do things (we are the “actor”), we tend to over-ascribe cause to situational factors. So, for example, when we fail at something, we tend toward situational explanations (e.g., “the sun was in my eyes,” “it was because of peer pressure,” etc.). Those watching us are biased toward making dispositional attributions for our actions (“she is awkward,” “he is immoral”). As a result, we tend to blame the situation, while others blame us.

How to get better self-insight: Realize that BOTH the situation and we are responsible for our actions and outcomes. Realize that others' perception is biased toward blaming us.

Self-Protective Biases & Rationalization. It is a very human tendency to believe that we are better, stronger, or smarter than others (for example, 90 percent of people believe that they are “above average” in [intelligence](#) and communication skills). When we fail, we often rationalize and make excuses. We do this, in part, to protect our [self-esteem](#), but in doing so, we also lack the self-insight that would allow us to improve.

How to get better self-insight: This is tough for many people, but it involves being honest and candid with ourselves. It takes courage to own up to mistakes, but in the long run we become better, stronger persons. This sort of courage and honesty is what builds character.

Lack of perspective. It is important to solicit others' honest opinions and to verify their opinions in order to gain better self-understanding. Seeing ourselves how others see us is good feedback for [understanding](#) how our behavioral patterns affect others. For example, organizations often rely on 360-degree feedback to improve an individual's performance and to develop [leadership](#). This involves getting evaluations from those around you—superiors, subordinates, peers. This helps in understanding how others see us (e.g., if your co-workers say you are “aloof” it may be your [shyness/introversion](#), and this feedback about how others interpret your actions can help you gain self-insight.

Magical thinking. Magical thinking is when we make associations between one event, for example, some behavior we performed, and some unrelated outcome. Some examples are superstitious behaviors or belief in magic, ESP, or some supernatural force. The problem with magical thinking is that we can believe that our actions are caused by the magical force instead of being due to us, or the social [environment](#). Reliance on magical thinking to explain things leads to [self-deception](#) and a lack of self-insight.