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MODULE 1: SELF-AWARENESS

How self-aware are you? How do you know? Do you have daily or weekly routines that support your consistent, ongoing efforts to increase your self-awareness? Your success as a leader is tightly coupled to your self-awareness, and in this module, you will have a chance to engage in furthering your self-awareness practice. Quite joyfully, doing this work will help you become a better human being, in general, in those few moments when you're not wearing your school leader hat. In fact, developing your self-awareness as a leader can help you become more comfortable and accepting of your perfectly imperfect humanity, which can increase your trustworthiness and authenticity in your community.

Self-awareness is even more critical if you are leading a diverse school community and especially so if you are a white school leader leading a community of color. Although this book's goal is not to provide an in-depth discussion of the many complex dynamics that are constantly in play when leading across difference, we want to highlight this issue and opportunity. Unless you are already actively engaged in developing your self-awareness, we strongly recommend that you assume that your self-awareness is not 100% aligned to how your community perceives you. Your goal in this module is to true up that awareness, particularly if you are a part of the dominant culture whose implicit position of power in your school and society may generally affect your self-awareness.

To help you visualize and connect to the concept of self-awareness as a school leader, consider the following short scenario. As you read, think about how the school leader exhibits self-awareness. Following the scenario, we take a very brief look at the self-awareness research base and connect the scenario to the research to help inform your self-awareness practice.

Ms. Jones noticed the time and realized she had only 20 minutes to prepare for a post-observation meeting with one of her teachers. This particular observation had not gone exceptionally well, and as Ms. Jones recalled the lesson, she recognized the familiar anxiety that always arose ahead of sharing challenging feedback. She sensed this anxiety starting in her stomach and moving its way into her throat. Ms. Jones turned her thoughts inward for a moment and focused her breathing on her feelings until she felt calm again.

Following that, Ms. Jones pulled up the checklist of short meeting preparation steps she kept on her smartphone. She liked to follow these steps to ensure she would be present, aware, and sensitive to the teacher during their meeting.

Here's what Ms. Jones kept in her meeting preparation note:

- Try not to speak for more than 30 seconds at a time
- Do not interrupt the other person(s)
- Listen actively; make sure the other participants know that you are listening
- Do not use sarcasm and, if you think humor has a place, double-check the other person's emotions to make sure you are making an appropriate choice
- Speak your truth and your experience and recognize that they are yours, but not necessarily others'
- Seek to be understood, not to be right
- Stay calm and respect others' emotional choices
- Take responsibility; you're the school leader, it's your job

She took a minute and mentally rehearsed how she was going to open the conversation to support the teacher in feeling as much at ease as possible. Ms. Jones typically let struggling teachers off the hook, so she reviewed her observation and feedback notes, made some minor edits and additions, and then ran through them as if she were the teacher hearing them for the first time. This practice allowed Ms. Jones to empathize with the teacher, increasing her self-awareness of how her feedback might land with the teacher. After doing so, she noted that sometimes her tone did not match her intent and that she should pay extra attention to that during the meeting. She also added this to her meeting preparation note for next time.

Last, Ms. Jones took one minute to close her eyes and visualize how she would speak and act during the most challenging parts of the meeting. She saw herself leaning on her self-awareness to present herself as an effective, empathetic, and supportive leader who nonetheless had high standards for her staff.

Feeling ready and as prepared as she could be, Ms. Jones opened the door to her office and invited her teacher in to begin the conversation.

We imagine that situations like this one sound and feel very familiar as they make up the day-to-day reality of many school leaders. Without bringing self-awareness skills to your practice, any situation with a hint of potential conflict can wreak havoc on your emotions, body, and long-term satisfaction. And let's face it, if your work leading a school does not regularly place you in situations with potential conflict, you may not be pursuing enough change for your students.

Research Basis for Self-Awareness

The human ability to be self-aware has a substantial research base, tracing back to the early 1970s. This research rests on the idea that objective self-awareness is the attention we place on ourselves as a social object and that this attention can help us grow and develop.

As with many constructs in social-emotional learning, the meaning of self-awareness has developed over time. Initially, self-awareness was defined as the psychological system that tries to achieve consistency between the individual's sense of self and standards set by that same individual. This system suggested that people judge their behavior, feelings, and thoughts in terms of personal standards or various forms. When a discrepancy emerges between the self and standards, a conflict arises that needs to be solved. However, a more recent upgrading of the theory suggests that self-awareness exists as a metacognitive process defined through its content and form, or the what and how of our internal lives.

Content, or the what, can consist of internal phenomena such as inner thoughts, desires, beliefs, emotions, or moods. Content also relates to external aspects, like behaviors or social relations. Form, on the other hand, consists of how you process your self-awareness through either (1) subjective processing about the self like your self-esteem, (2) defensive processing like feelings of danger or low trust, (3) outer processing of social situations like how to act or adapt in a social situation, or (4) reflective processing based on accepted values and behavior, like asking, "Did I offend anybody with that joke?" (Zabrowski & Slaski, 2003).

The CASEL Framework took much of the research on self-awareness and broke it down into four distinct content areas or internal phenomena. As a school leader, you should continually pay attention to all these:

- Emotions
- Strengths

- Self-confidence
- Self-efficacy

The CASEL Framework also lays out forms of self-awareness or ways for a leader to think about self-awareness, mainly in the subjective processing realm. Subjective processing suggests that self-aware people tend to

- identify some content internally like an emotion,
- recognize the content, and
- make accurate self-perceptions like “I am feeling angry right now.”

So what can CASEL’s research base tell us about Ms. Jones?

First, from a content perspective, Ms. Jones was highly aware that she was feeling some anxiety and knew from experience that if she didn’t minimize it, the teacher would likely sense her tension. Ms. Jones not only labeled her emotion but also identified the physical source, or the embodied notion, of the feeling.

Wisely, Ms. Jones also used a particular tool, her electronic note that reminded her of crucial items that demanded her self-awareness. Simple, quick supports like this increase the likelihood that you will be able to behave in a manner more in line with your expectations for yourself.

Ms. Jones also demonstrated self-awareness in that she recognized where she needed to grow her practice, because she would often let struggling teachers off the hook. In doing so, she made an accurate self-perception. She considered this growth area, prepared what she would say to the teacher, and visualized remaining calm during the discussion. Ms. Jones realized her responsibility, in part, to provide emotional support to the teacher, and so she worked to focus her emotional attention in that way. As a result of her preparation, she created the conditions in which, as a leader, she could have the self-confidence to provide such support.

Second, from a form perspective, Ms. Jones used a personal processing method to identify her more subjective states, acknowledge them, and then make accurate self-perceptions about herself.

Some of the research underlying self-awareness also comes from the circumplex theory of emotion, which supplies a system for classifying emotions (Brackett, 2019). In this model, emotions have two dimensions: energy and pleasantness.

Your feelings can have high energy, such as when you are excited, or low energy, such as when you are depressed. Your emotions can also be pleasant, like when you feel joy, or unpleasant, such as when you feel sadness. This theory is one that the RULER system out of Yale uses to teach students how to recognize and become more self-aware of their emotions (Brackett, 2019). This model of self-awareness can also help you as a leader better process your emotional states similar to the daily emotional check we have added for you as you work through the daily prompts in this book.

Why Self-Awareness Is Critical for School Leaders

Self-awareness research points out that focusing your attention, occasionally, on yourself can lead to more conscious awareness and more accurate self-evaluation. This research supports why reflection and spending some time by yourself is so critical as a leader. Importantly, this is why we designed the book to provide you with short, daily prompts to think and reflect on your practice. The more you engage in these activities, the higher the likelihood you will improve your leadership and your capacity to serve students.

Self-awareness is also critical for you as a school leader because your emotions are contagious. If you are feeling anxiety when talking to a teacher, they too are likely feeling this. If you are not confident when speaking to your whole staff or a team, this energy will be transmitted to them. It is important to note that this dynamic is especially harmful when white leaders avoid engaging in hard conversations across differences in their communities as a result of not being more self-aware.

As you head into practicing your self-awareness skills, here's the main takeaway for why this competency is so essential: You need better self-awareness to be an effective leader. Then, you can start to apply that awareness to interactions with others to gain even more personal insights, including how, as a leader, you impact others. You become more self-aware by focusing your attention on your inner thoughts and feelings, seeking to understand why they are emerging as they are. So as you work through this module, keep these theories and research in mind as you develop your self-awareness.

MODULE 1: SELF-AWARENESS

In this module you will learn more about Self-Awareness through

Week 1.1: Developing Accurate Self-Perception

Week 1.2: Strengths of Emotions

Week 1.3: Developing Self-Confidence

Week 1.4: Developing Self-Efficacy

WEEK 1.1: Developing Accurate Self-Perception

An effective and inspiring leader is aware of their true self to the highest degree possible even if the truth may sometimes be painful. As a leader, when you develop an accurate self-perception, you are also improving your self-awareness. Effective leaders continually interrogate who they think they are based on numerous inputs, including your own and others' feedback and assessments.

A leader who is unaware of how they are perceived, in contrast, is doomed to failure. This shortcoming stems from a lack of developing an accurate self-perception. As a leader, if you do not develop self-awareness, you will never recognize the issues and opportunities that exist, ultimately, to better serve students and lead staff beyond the blinders an inaccurate self-perception imposes.

If you are a leader who believes that developing an accurate self-perception is essential, you will contribute significantly to inspiring and creating a culture of humility, reflection, and persistence. One might argue that when you insist on the development of accurate self-perception and nothing else, you might catalyze more change than any other SEL-related action you might take. Without the opportunity to lead and grow from an honest and accurate self-perception, the likelihood of other necessary changes is diminished.

This week you'll focus explicitly on developing and extending that very skill. We also want to point out that you might wish to move back and forth between this skill and the synergistic skills **2.2 Goal-Setting and Productive Habits**, **2.4 Impulse Control**, and **2.5 Stress Management**.

1.1 DAY 1: Developing Accurate Self-Perception

★ *“When I discover who I am, I’ll be free.”* —Ralph Ellison

Reflection for Today: On a scale of one to five, where one is low, and five is high, how accurate do you think your self-perception is? What evidence do you have to support your self-assessment?

List one thing you’re grateful for today:

Check the Feeling Wheel inside the front cover and list any emotion(s) you are feeling.

A grid of 20 columns and 15 rows of small dots for writing.

1.1 DAY 2: Developing Accurate Self-Perception



☆ *“It’s not strength, it’s PERCEPTION that makes you stronger. If you change how you SEE it, you’ll change how you FEEL about it.” –Yvonne Pierre*

Reflection for Today: How have you incorporated accurate self-perception in your leadership practice? If you have not included it, how might you do so?

List one thing you’re grateful for today:

Check the Feeling Wheel inside the front cover and list any emotion(s) you are feeling.

A large grid of small dots for listing emotions.

1.1 DAY 3: Developing Accurate Self-Perception

★ *“Self-awareness is the ability to take an honest look at your life without any attachment to it being right or wrong, good or bad.”* —Debbie Ford

Reflection for Today: Share your self-perception in a particular area of your practice (listening, speaking, coalition building, change management, etc.) with a trusted colleague and ask for the colleague’s assessment of your skill in your chosen area. How accurate was your self-perception in comparison to your colleague’s assessment?

List one thing you’re grateful for today:

Check the Feeling Wheel inside the front cover and list any emotion(s) you are feeling.

A large grid of small dots for writing.

1.1 DAY 4: Developing Accurate Self-Perception



☆ *“The only people who see the whole picture are the ones who step outside the frame.”* —Salman Rushdie

Reflection for Today: Identify the aspect of your practice that you feel you have least accurately assessed. Define a plan to increase your self-perception accuracy in this area (suggested simple plans might include conducting a survey, taking a colleague or colleagues out for coffee, hosting a lunch or off-site that invites all participants, including yourself, to engage in this assessment, etc.).

List one thing you’re grateful for today:

Check the Feeling Wheel inside the front cover and list any emotion(s) you are feeling.

Grid of dots for writing.

1.1 DAY 5: Developing Accurate Self-Perception

☆ *“Don’t wait until you die to be reborn. Your past does not define who you are, it’s the only muscle that you are building for your future.”* —Mayra Rubio

Leadership Considerations: This week, you explored accurate self-perception. As you think more about this concept, consider these questions:

1. How has your self-perception impacted others this week?
2. How can you lead your staff and students to develop more accurate self-perceptions?
3. Review all the notes you took this week and find your one best thought. Now go share your insight with somebody who might benefit from it.

Weekly Effort

1	2	3	4	5
none	minimal	some	moderate	significant

Weekly Impact

1	2	3	4	5
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Check the Feeling Wheel inside the front cover and list any emotion(s) you are feeling.

A large rectangular area with a light gray background and a grid of small dots, intended for writing or drawing.

WEEK 1.2: Strengths of Emotions

For many years, the development of psychology was based on a deficit model. We lacked this quality or that trait. Psychology as a field of study developed around pathology, dysfunction, and disorders. In essence, it focused on the disease model of the mind. However, in the early 2000s, psychologists began to question this emphasis and started a counter to this called *positive psychology*. Positive psychology calls us to focus on finding our strengths, acknowledging the best things in life, and fulfilling the lives of people with whom we work. Instead of always trying to overcome the worst, positive psychology asks: What does it take to build a good life and flourish? One part of this perspective is to become more self-aware of your strengths—both your emotional strengths and character strengths—so that you can apply these strengths to working with your fellow educators and students.

This week, you'll focus on being aware of your personal strengths and helping others see theirs. The character strengths come from a project done in 2004 called the Classification of Character Strengths, whose aim was to study positive dispositions from history, religions, psychology, psychiatry, and philosophy and pull out those most common across cultures. Researchers (Seligman & Peterson, 2004) found one area of strength is the strength of emotions that you will explore this week as part of being self-aware.

We also want to point out that you might wish to move back and forth between this skill and the synergistic skills **2.1 Self-Motivation, 2.2 Goal-Setting, and Productive Habits, and 2.4 Impulse Control.**

1.2 DAY 2: Strengths of Emotions



☆ *“Strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from an indomitable will.”* –Gandhi

Reflection for Today: From your response yesterday, why do you think you spend most of your emotional time in the positive or negative area? What is that information trying to tell you?

List one thing you’re grateful for today:

Check the Feeling Wheel inside the front cover and list any emotion(s) you are feeling.

Grid of dots for listing emotions.

WEEK 1.3: Developing Self-Confidence

Self-confidence may be defined as “an individual’s trust in his or her own abilities, capacities, and judgments, or belief that he or she can successfully face day to day challenges and demands” (Psychology Dictionary Online, as cited in Ackerman, 2020). As a school leader, you often use your leadership qualities in various forms to make judgments about situations, students, and teachers. Self-confidence is backward-facing, meaning you gain more and more confidence as you gain successful experience over time. Leaders with high self-confidence trust themselves, have a favorable view of their skill levels, and know how to delegate those areas that are outside their comfort zone. Leaders with a high sense of self-confidence also know how to withstand criticisms that may come their way. In contrast, leaders with low self-confidence often feel afraid of making a mistake or wrong decision.

Developing self-confidence does not mean that you are perfect at everything (an unachievable and unnecessary state, in any case). Under the larger umbrella of self-awareness, though, you know your strengths and what you need to improve in yourself as a leader. Developing self-confidence as a leader helps lessen your fear and anxiety, builds your resilience, and gives you greater motivation to continue trying new things and grow as a leader.

This week as you explore your self-confidence, think about how you want to lead. How can self-confidence enhance how you meet that vision? We also want to point out that you might wish to move back and forth between this skill and the synergistic skills **2.1 Self-Motivation and 2.2 Goal-Setting and Productive Habits**.

1.3 DAY 2: Developing Self-Confidence



★ *“Whether you come from a council estate or a country estate, your success will be determined by your own confidence and fortitude.” –Michelle Obama*

Reflection for Today: As a school leader, in which situations or things do you need to develop more confidence? Where could you serve students better if you had more confidence?

List one thing you’re grateful for today:

Check the Feeling Wheel inside the front cover and list any emotion(s) you are feeling.

Grid of 20 columns and 10 rows of small dots for recording emotions.

1.3 DAY 4: Developing Self-Confidence



☆ *“When someone tells me ‘no,’ it doesn’t mean I can’t do it, it simply means I can’t do it with them.”* —Karen E. Quinones Miller

Practice for Today: What great undertaking needs to happen at your school? What do you need to gain more confidence in to lead this undertaking? How will you do this?

List one thing you’re grateful for today:

Check the Feeling Wheel inside the front cover and list any emotion(s) you are feeling.

1.3 DAY 5: Developing Self-Confidence

☆ *“Each time we face our fear, we gain strength, courage, and confidence in the doing.”* —Theodore Roosevelt

Leadership Considerations: This week, you reflected on and practiced developing self-confidence. As you think more about this skill, consider these questions:

1. How does the degree of my self-confidence impact others? Where do I need to gain more self-confidence?
2. How can I lead my staff and students to develop their self-confidence?
3. Review all the notes you took this week and find your one best thought. Now go share your insight with somebody who might benefit from it.

Weekly Effort

1	2	3	4	5
none	minimal	some	moderate	significant

Weekly Impact

1	2	3	4	5
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Check the Feeling Wheel inside the front cover and list any emotion(s) you are feeling.

A large rectangular area with a light gray dotted grid pattern for writing.

WEEK 1.4: Developing Self-Efficacy

Similar to self-confidence, self-efficacy is defined as the belief that one has in one's ability to succeed or reach a goal. It is a belief in your abilities to exert control and motivation over your behavior toward something aspirational. Self-efficacy is future-facing (compared to self-confidence, which is backward-facing) in that you believe you can accomplish a goal you set for yourself in the future. If you have a high sense of self-efficacy, you tend to set more ambitious goals and have higher degrees of motivation to succeed. With a high degree of self-efficacy, you also tend to take more risks, persist toward goals longer, and know how to advocate for yourself.

Self-efficacy is future-facing; self-confidence is backward-facing.

In today's educational environment, you need to develop a high degree of self-efficacy in many new and complex areas. With complex change, more ambitious learning, technology, and a volatile environment, you need to develop a sense of efficacy to handle all that comes your way for the sake of your staff and students. Self-efficacy can develop from positive past experiences, learning from others, social persuasion through coaching and feedback, imagining success, and recognizing the physical and emotional states that alert you when facing a challenge.

This week we use quotes from Albert Bandura, the psychologist who developed the theory of self-efficacy, among others. As you explore your self-efficacy, reflect on why self-efficacy is critical to grow as a leader. We also want to point out that you might wish to move back and forth between this skill and the synergistic skills **2.1 Self-Motivation, 2.2 Goal-Setting and Productive Habits, and 2.6 Self-Discipline.**

1.4 DAY 2: Developing Self-Efficacy



☆ *“Confront the dark parts of yourself, and work to banish them with illumination and forgiveness. Your willingness to wrestle with your demons will cause your angels to sing.”*
—August Wilson

Reflection for Today: As a school leader, where and in what ways do you need to persist in your development of greater self-efficacy?

List one thing you’re grateful for today:

Check the Feeling Wheel inside the front cover and list any emotion(s) you are feeling.

A large rectangular area filled with a grid of small dots for writing.

1.4 DAY 5: Developing Self-Efficacy

★ *“People’s beliefs about their abilities have a profound effect on these abilities. Ability is not a fixed property; there is a huge variability in how you perform.”* —Albert Bandura

Leadership Considerations: This week, you reflected on and practiced developing self-efficacy. As you think more about this skill, consider these questions:

1. How do the areas where you feel most self-efficacious impact others? How do the areas where you feel less self-efficacy impact others? What can you accept as a challenge?
2. How can you lead your staff and students to consider developing their self-efficacy? How can you use this content and your new understandings with your staff and students?
3. Review all the notes you took this week and find your one best thought. Now go share your insight with somebody who might benefit from it.

Weekly Effort	1	2	3	4	5
	none	minimal	some	moderate	significant

Weekly Impact	1	2	3	4	5
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Check the Feeling Wheel inside the front cover and list any emotion(s) you are feeling.