

GET A REALITY CHECK

By Barbara Bouchet, MEd

ADAPTED FROM
The ENLIGHTENED EDGE for LEADERS:
Ignite the Power of You

*"This is a thought-provoking, insightful, powerful book.
For leaders, for life."*

— **Stephen R. Covey**

Author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*
and *The Leader in Me*

The
**ENLIGHTENED
EDGE**
for
LEADERS

Ignite the **POWER** of You

BARBARA BOUCHET

GET A REALITY CHECK

Develop a practice of getting feedback from as many sources as possible. Be sure to zero in on those areas where you can least afford to have a blind spot.

YOU can get a reality check anytime you test your assumptions about what is going on around you. For example, a business may need information about what its customers really want. At work, you may need feedback from people who can support or inhibit your success. At home, you may need to know how the people you are close to feel about you.

A reality check is like going to the doctor for a checkup. It's uncomfortable being probed. Waiting for test results is anxiety provoking, but at least you'll know what you're dealing with. Even if the news is bad, you are generally better off finding out about a potential problem before it worsens.

Regular reality checks will help you cut through limiting illusions and equip you to deal with what is really going on. You'll find out if you're doing anything that could leave you vulnerable to unnecessary damage. Feedback is the only way you can see what otherwise may be a blind spot that could undermine your success.

Everyone has blind spots, where they can't see themselves or their impact. Blind spots, by definition, operate outside your awareness or field of vision. But when you bring a blind spot into awareness, your enlightened edge expands. Consider getting feedback anytime you realize that you need missing information that may be critical to your success in some significant area of your life or work.

Even though a reality check may be initially uncomfortable, the process gets easier with time.

When you become used to dealing with what is really going on around you (rather than your untested assumptions), your relationship with reality gets friendlier. This puts you in a great position to learn.

Other people see you in a variety of ways. And they rarely see you the way you see yourself. Feedback can be full of surprises. Most people who go through the process of acquiring direct feedback from others get insight into some of their defensive strategies, but are often most surprised by how positive and encouraging the feedback is.

If you stay open and curious, learning can be fascinating. This assumes that you've calmed down any of your defensiveness enough to be able to take in feedback from other people.

The more limited side of you may not focus on the positive feedback and may instead fixate on the possibility that a blind spot may be exposed. It will typically feel anxious about the possibility but do nothing about it. The same part of you could also confidently careen into a potential disaster, in complete ignorance. On the other hand, the more expanded side of you will be willing to get the information it needs, even if it's uncomfortable.

In the following example, Sandy sought feedback in a situation that was difficult to read. It helped her put her anxiety to rest and to adjust more easily to a new role.

Sandy

Sandy was the leader of the American sales division of a large company that sold health care products. She was in her early forties and used to having her bonus linked with her sales numbers. After a big organizational shake-up, she was moved out of sales and into a role that supported sales and marketing. The new position was a lateral move, with less immediate reward but higher potential for advancement.

She was ambivalent about the new role since it required many new skills and the rewards were not well defined or directly within her control. Sandy also wasn't sure if her manager intended the move as a promotion or as a demotion. She didn't know if he put her in the new position because he respected her potential or because he was in some way dissatisfied. She was chewing on this for weeks when it became clear that she needed a reality check.

Sandy had a candid conversation with her manager. She asked for clarification of his reasoning regarding the new position, and he did so happily. It was very reassuring to hear that he was highly invested in her leadership potential and that he saw this new position as providing the necessary challenges for her development.

Her manager also pointed out a gap in her ability to collaborate. He hoped the new role would help her to strengthen her collaborative skill set. Sandy's response to the conversation was initially mixed, but she quickly assimilated the information. The reality check helped her settle into the new role and to take on the challenges wholeheartedly.

If, like Sandy, you're proactive and get a reality check when you need to, you'll be able to catch any troublesome blind spots. The new information can help you test your assumptions, expectations, and

concerns. This ensures that you're really on track with your best efforts.

The following two-part exercise will give you a chance to identify where you may need a reality check.

Exercise: Need a Reality Check?

PART 1: Blind Spot?

Answer the following questions to identify where you may have a blind spot or could benefit from a reality check.

Yes No Am I fulfilling my potential as a leader?

Yes No Are my direct reports (subordinates) fulfilling their potential?

Yes No Are my informal partners (customers, vendors, peers, business groups) developing their potential?

If you answered Yes to all of the above, it appears that you and your organization are thriving. But before assuming that all is well, consider the questions in Part 2.

If you answered No to any of the above, you know that something isn't quite right. Asking the questions in Part 2 will provide some clues about where the power leak or blockage is occurring.

If you're not sure how to answer some of the above questions, you are lacking vital information. The questions in Part 2 will provide some insight.

PART 2: Where Are You Losing Power?

In my current role, am I often:

Yes No Angry, irritated, or annoyed

Yes No Depleted, discouraged, or disappointed

Yes No Confused, fearful, or anxious

Are my direct reports often:Yes No Angry, irritated, or annoyedYes No Depleted, discouraged, or disappointedYes No Confused, fearful, or anxious**Are my informal partners often:**Yes No Angry, irritated, or annoyed with my organization or meYes No Depleted, discouraged, or disappointed with my organization or meYes No Confused, fearful, or anxious about my organization or me

If you answered Yes to any of the above, deeper investigation is warranted.

If you don't know how to answer the above questions, further investigation is even more important since there is a serious information gap that could leave you needlessly vulnerable.

If you answered No to all of the above questions, you may indeed be walking on water. Or you may be fooling yourself. If you feel quite certain that all is well, seek an objective opinion from someone who has nothing to lose by being honest.

Action Steps

1. Ask your co-workers for honest feedback on how you could contribute more effectively. Make it safe for them to do so. They need to know that you really want honesty and that you're willing to hear things that may be uncomfortable.
2. Ask your best friend how you could be a better friend.
3. Ask your spouse or partner what they most want from you that you have rarely provided.
4. If you are in a leadership position, hire an executive coach or consultant to do some interviewing for you. A skilled coach will

be able to target the most relevant issues and bring them to the surface. He or she will also be able to bring the information back to you in a way that allows you both understand what is going on and devise an action plan for addressing needed changes.

©2012 Barbara Bouchet

BARBARA BOUCHET, MEd

- ◆ Coach
- ◆ Consultant
- ◆ Facilitator

WORKING WITH

- ◆ Leaders
- ◆ Teams
- ◆ Professionals

AUTHOR OF

- ◆ *[The Enlightened Edge for Leaders: Ignite the Power of You](#)*, book
- ◆ *[The Contact-Zone™: Power & Influence](#)*, board game and training
- ◆ *[Work-Life Effectiveness Assessment](#)*
- ◆ *[Performance and Balance: Dynamic Tools for Work & Life](#)*, training and transformational toolkit
- ◆ *[Courageous Conversations](#)*, training

For more free articles, go to:
<http://ContactPointAssoc.com>

To talk to Barbara, call 206-361-4730 or
email: BB@ContactPointAssoc.com