



*Chapter 2*

## KNOWING YOURSELF

*“To thine own self be true.”*

— Shakespeare

*W*e do not know our self when we are born, but we learn to know our self as we grow and develop. This is why I find it fascinating to explore how much people know about themselves. I have learned that most of us do not know who we are as individuals. This simple question, “What can you tell me about yourself?” can lead to interesting responses. For example, on the first day of an international business management class I was facilitating, I asked the students to introduce themselves to the class to get an idea of who their classmates were. I had instructed them to include something unique about themselves in the introductions. It was interesting to notice that most students only introduced themselves by their names, job titles, and where they lived. Seldom did the students share anything about who they really were. It took the whole semester for students to start getting to know each other on a personal level. That class reminded me that, as humans, we tend

to have shallow thoughts when it comes to personal awareness. In addition, our interactions and behaviors are shaped based on the people who surround us. For example, the above name, job, and location introduction happens often upon first meeting. Nothing is mentioned about who they are as individuals at a deeper level. However, leading in a diverse and inclusive environment requires that you know yourself first before you can lead others. In his book *How the Best Leaders Lead*, Brian Tracy makes it clear that leaders know themselves. They know who they are and what they want.

There are many ways to affirm you know yourself. For example, verbal persuasion. In his book *Self-Efficacy*, Albert Bandura contends that people who are persuaded verbally are likely to mobilize greater efforts and sustain them to the extent that they are likely to succeed in whatever they are doing. When people tell you that you can lead others in a diverse environment, you start believing what you are being told and it becomes part of your norm as you move forward.

Another way you can affirm that you know yourself is through vicarious experience in which secondhand information becomes the reality of who you truly are. For example, in college and early in my career, I went out drinking with friends a lot. Then I started drinking alone. At that point, I thought I needed alcohol, but I felt like I was still just me. Jennifer saw it differently. She told me several times I was different when I was drinking. I didn't see it. Because of the behavior patterns I developed, it was a challenge to know myself.

I realized later that my behavior was ruining my life. Kaplan and Donovan contend that an individual's raised awareness comes from skilled consultation and development. This is exactly what was going on in my life. My wife would share her thoughts, and as a result, I was developing awareness in some form. On this point, Albert Bandura points out that efficacy appraisals are influenced by vicarious experiences, and there is little ambiguity about whether people know themselves or not.

When you are leading in a diverse environment, there should be no question as to whether you can lead others or not. Through vicarious experiences, you know yourself whether you have the capabilities of leading others. It should be as simple as knowing whether you can swim or not. This is when you can be true to yourself, and only you can make that judgment call because if you can swim, you will not be afraid to jump in a swimming pool. Leaders in a diverse environment should introduce themselves by mentioning their names and their background to solidify their leadership abilities. If the background is missing in the introduction, people will have more questions about whether the leader can be inclusive and lead them in a diverse environment. Expressing your background as a leader alerts others that you know yourself and have leadership capabilities. Otherwise, they will think this is your first time leading others. In her book *The Quick and Easy Way to Effective Speaking*, Dorothy Carnegie contends that, “Speakers who talk about what life has taught them never fail to keep the attention of their listeners.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, talking about your background helps to open dialogues about your past. People will ask you questions and engage in communication with you based on your leadership abilities.

### WHAT IS KNOWING YOURSELF?

Do you know yourself? What steps have you taken to ensure you know yourself well enough to talk with others about who you really are? In fact, what exactly does knowing yourself mean for you? I know a lot of people who say they know themselves pretty well, but that changes when they are asked questions beyond name, job, home, and maybe a hobby.

As leaders in a diverse environment, we need to understand that

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<sup>1</sup> Carnegie. p. 47.

knowing ourselves is not simply scanning and skimming through our lives for what's on the surface. It is not about our favorite restaurants, music, vacation, homes, cars, or makeup kit. Knowing yourself is a lifelong journey full of unpredictable events and surprises.

When I ask people who they are, they often respond with superficial information because they don't want to shame themselves or respond in a way that shows their weaknesses. When you lead in a diverse environment, you need to know that there are factors, such as the setting, personality, and behavior, that will shape the conversation. Therefore, you cannot get the responses you are looking for when more than one person, besides you, is present. Although you want to be part of the inclusive environment, you still need to focus on one-on-one interactions to get the relevant information.

When you dig deeper into your life, you may notice that some core values and deep fundamentals are missing. Seeking to understand those missing values and fundamentals will help you know yourself and learn to behave in ways others would like to follow. In his book *On Becoming a Leader*, Warren Bennis noted, "By the time we reach puberty, the world has reached us and shapes us to a greater extent than we realize. . . . For some leaders this happens early."<sup>2</sup> Bennis continues by pointing out that self-knowledge is a lifelong process, and nobody can teach you how to become yourself.

However, this does not mean you can't find useful input from others as you learn to know yourself. But knowing yourself takes time, diverse experiences, and commitment. It requires being dedicated to having a deep conversation with yourself about yourself, regardless of whether it is scary or uncomfortable.

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<sup>2</sup> Bennis, p. 49.

### **Knowing Yourself Is the First Step in Improving Your Life**

Knowing yourself means giving yourself permission to explore your inner self. It gives you the ability to know who you are from the deepest roots. The permissions you give yourself will help you discover your weaknesses and strengths. In their book *Leadership: The Challenge for the Information Profession*, Sue Roberts and Jennifer Rowley point out that, “Our self-concept is important because it not only allows us to think about who we are and how others see us..., but also impacts on our confidence and self-esteem.”<sup>3</sup> These discoveries become the first steps in improving your life. If you do not know yourself, it is difficult to get things accomplished. Successful people know who they are—yes, there are a few exceptions, people still searching for the truth about themselves making it big, but most successful people know exactly who they are. For example, when speaking with British *Vogue*’s editor-in-chief, Edwards Enniful, Oprah Winfrey pointed out that, “The beauty of my life is that from thirty-two, thirty-three on, I figured out how to be myself completely on television and all these years I have made a fortune being myself.”<sup>4</sup> Oprah believes she is successful because she knew herself for a long time. In a diverse environment, she would lead and include others effectively because she knows what she can or cannot do.

Our journey to self-knowledge is lifelong because the discoveries do not end until we die. But the journey is worth the effort. Knowing yourself can help you plan and set goals for the future. How can you expect to improve your life if you do not know what you want to achieve? In addition, self-awareness helps you remember past actions, helping to avoid repeating the same mistakes again and again.

Furthermore, self-knowledge can help you lead and coach others, advocate for others, and help them achieve their dreams.

<sup>3</sup> Roberts and Rowley. p. 29.

<sup>4</sup> Winfrey. Para. 3.

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Finally, by knowing yourself, you can achieve great happiness because you'll have learned from your life lessons.

Successful people know themselves, learn from their mistakes, and know what they are trying to achieve. An example is Tyler Perry, a film actor in the United States. According to *Biography*, he had a difficult childhood. At one point, Perry even attempted suicide to escape his difficulties. Perry was disappointed, yet he knew himself well enough that he was determined to be successful one day. Therefore, he continued to write, knowing he would break through to success one day. Of course, he is a very successful actor, and his plays continue to make the successful leap to the big screen. He took on the leading role in *Madea's Family Reunion* (2006), which he also directed and produced. The film scored well with movie goers, bringing in more than \$63 million. If Perry didn't know himself, he would not be where he is today. Examples like Perry prove that knowing yourself is key to becoming successful when leading in a diverse and inclusive environment. Therefore, you need to know yourself if you want to improve your life rather than fall prey to unnecessary loneliness.

### **Knowing Yourself Is Scary**

Yes, knowing yourself can be scary for everyone. Through the process of knowing yourself, you come face-to-face with the reality of your life. Some things might scare you because you did not realize they existed. However, these items have been part of you all along; you simply ignored or failed to notice them previously. In my case, I was scared of the next chapter of my life once I knew alcohol was not good for me. I didn't know what to do because alcohol was all I knew.

Fear of the future can make life confusing and lead to depression. However, don't let fear discourage you from learning about yourself, because once you go beyond the scary phases, your discoveries will

help you focus on what has to be done to become successful.

When I discovered who I was, I was scared to meet the reality. I was in the middle of finishing up my doctoral dissertation. Life was tough; I thought about dropping out of school if learning to know myself became too ugly; I feared losing my family because I behaved badly when I was drunk, and losing my teaching position because I was feeling overwhelmed. I had to go through these crossroads to become successful. I was sleep-deprived from juggling multiple thoughts. I knew I was a smart student, but that did not help me discover who I was. Discoveries about my true self made me scared.

Because knowing yourself does not mean only scratching the surface, but going deeper into your personal being, you must give yourself permission to discover who you truly are. The process will help you respect your personal fears, desires, and dreams. You will discover what you like and don't like; you will discover what has been missing in your life, and what you would like to achieve as you move forward; you will discover true friends and happiness. The people you might think are your friends today may just be acquaintances and not true friends. When you know who you are, you might need to get rid of some people who are a bad influence on you. In some cases, you might need to confront the people who have been using your vulnerabilities for their own personal gain. You might need to change your hobbies and habits altogether. Yes, the thought of losing friends, old habits, and everything that has been a part of your life can be scary, but a better life lies on the other side of self-discovery.

### **Knowing Yourself Is Uncomfortable**

You have to know yourself to be completely comfortable, but the process is uncomfortable because of the discoveries you will make on the journey. You will experience life-changing situations. You may need to

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discuss issues with your partner, family, and/or friends. Yes, the discussions will make you uncomfortable. Sharing deep-rooted information that might not be known otherwise is uncomfortable at best. People may be shocked by some revelations. And as you learn about yourself, people may see the changes, so you may need to explain them.

Once you pass through the uncomfortable stages, you will be in control of your life because from that moment on, you will not be ashamed of anything. You will have had a reality check, and you and everyone else will understand exactly who you are. If you are still uncomfortable, you may not have had the reality check.

Changes can be tough to make because you may be controlled by others' viewpoints. In most cases, people who are uncomfortable do not have a deep understanding of themselves. Their behavior is based on what they hear and see from others. They want to fit in and be accepted.

But the uncomfortable feeling is the first and most important step toward a brighter future. Once you make a deep examination of yourself and realize your strengths and weaknesses, you can make changes based on what you would like to become.

For me, the uncomfortable phase was the toughest. I had to give up habits that were draining my energy and affecting my personal health and wellbeing. When I was with old friends, it was challenging to tell them I could not go to bars and enjoy alcoholic beverages. That was not my normal behavior in their eyes. I had to explain myself several times. I was the same person, but going through life changes.

Some people supported me while others did not. This situation was uncomfortable because some of the people who didn't support me I had thought were my true friends. In fact, some of them disappeared because I was not doing things they were used to. That feeling caused me to start doubting and double-checking my actions to



see whether what I was doing was right. I would often ask myself, *Why am I not doing the same things I used to do? Can I do them in moderation?* These questioning thoughts are uncomfortable because you are doubting your actions and feelings. However, only you can know what is best for you, and true friends will support you regardless of your circumstances. It is better to let those who will not support you go their own ways. You have to refocus your priorities and know who your true friends are. I did it, and so can you.

### **Knowing Yourself Is About Respecting Your Characteristics**

Do you know your strengths and weaknesses, your desires, your passions, your friends, your level of tolerance, your likes and dislikes, and your limitations? If you can answer yes to these questions, then you know yourself well enough to respect your characteristics. If you do not know yourself and take time for self-reflection, it is impossible to have respect for your characteristics. Reflecting on yourself means having a deep dialogue about you and asking the right questions at the right time, aiming at true discovery of yourself. Nothing is truly yours until you have a deep understanding of your characteristics. This is why the United States has systems in place to cater to diversity and inclusion. In their book *The Inclusion Dividend: Why Investing in Diversity and Inclusion Pays Off*, Kaplan and Donovan noted that other countries, such as the United Kingdom, have similar laws to the United States because they want to respect the characteristics they know. In fact, Britain passed the Equal Pay Act, Sex Discrimination Act, and Race Relations Act in the 1970s because people knew themselves and understood the differences that exist. To be on an equal playing field, people accepted these laws because they respect one another. Without knowing yourself, it is challenging to have respect for yourself and others.

Shakespeare once wrote, “To thine own self be true.” You have to be

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true to yourself before you can engage others in the leadership journey. This is exactly what Nelson Mandela did when he was in prison. Because he knew himself, he was true in his speech and actions regardless of who was around. That led him to freedom and convinced others to want to be with him in his fight for freedom. In his book *Long Walk to Freedom*, Mandela writes, “Some of the warders began to engage us in a conversation. I never initiated conversation with warders, but if they addressed a question to me, I tried to answer. It is easier to educate a man when he wants to learn.”<sup>5</sup> Because Mandela knew himself, he respected his characteristics by being humble. He would use his opportunity when the time was right. When you lead others in a diverse environment, it is always important to know who you are, including knowing your capabilities and limitations. Once you know yourself, you will respect your characteristics at all times. It is by respecting your characteristics that you will get ahead. Nelson Mandela did it, and so can you.

The people you associate with make a difference because our friends often share many of our characteristics. Research I conducted on demographic differences in 2013 proved the point that people who have similar demographic characteristics tend to associate with one another. The same research showed that dissimilarity leads to repulsion when different people are working together. For example, if you are a Christian, you likely have friends who are Christians; if you like camping, you likely have friends who like camping, etc. Because you associate with people who have similar characteristics, you have greater respect for those characteristics since they are part of what makes you who you are. This is why knowing yourself is a source for respecting your characteristics.

One day I was having a serious discussion with another author. He informed me, “You do not seek marriage counseling from an indi-

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<sup>5</sup> Mandela. p. 457.

vidual who is three times divorced.” *What?* I thought for a moment because that did not make any sense to me. He continued, “If you are married, while three quarters of your friends are single, what marriage advice are you going to get from them?” These words stuck in my head. I realized our choice of friends reflects our respect for our characteristics. We generally have a few friends who are different, but the majority of our friends share many of our characteristics. Otherwise, something is not aligned properly. Once you know yourself, you will start respecting your characteristics, which are fundamental for good decision-making. The question is: How can you respect your characteristics if you do not know yourself?

### **Knowing Yourself Makes You Change**

Have you ever daydreamed about replacing your whole family? You are not alone. Humans go through challenging times, but those times make us develop and grow into who we are. For example, growing up in Malawi, I wondered why other people were born in wealthy countries, such as the United States? It wasn’t until after I came to know myself that I realized one’s country of birth does not make one a leader. It is the character that matters. Therefore, I had to change my attitude and stay focused on the future. Despite all the challenges, it is always important to remember that nobody plans his or her own birth. You were born to a poor family or a wealthy family, and you had no control over the situation—it simply happened. In my case, I chose to change and stop worrying about what my future held based on my place of birth. Rather, I changed and chose the path of inclusion, diversity, and future focus.

Once we know ourselves, we can change and do better things. In his book *On Becoming a Leader*, Warren Bennis contends that knowing yourself means, “Separating who you are and who you want to be

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from what the world thinks you are and wants you to be.”<sup>6</sup> Therefore, if you do not like the behavior in your family or partner, you can make changes and good choices to become someone who can change your own life. Problems grow bigger when you do not know yourself because then you do not know what to change. This is why Brian Tracy noted that people who know themselves know what they want, and they can personalize time and available resources to get things accomplished. People who know themselves can make calculated changes in their lives and be productive. I did it by choosing to focus on education, which has propelled me to embrace diversity and inclusion. Therefore, knowing yourself is an essential process in bringing definitive changes to your and other people’s lives.

Our ancestors had to make significant changes to survive. For example, our nomadic ancestors, driven by the changing conditions of their time, began making changes to their houses and clothing because of brutal weather conditions and farming and domesticating animals, such as chickens, so they would have readily available food to survive. Changes are necessary, especially when you are rejected by others. Sometimes things do not work well, and friends may run away from you. You wonder how to survive alone, but life still goes on. But the rejection does make you adjust and make some changes.

When I finished secondary school in Malawi, I wanted to study science at the university. Because selection was based on merit at the national level, only the brightest of the bright would be selected. Another criterion used for candidate selection was one’s district of origin. Consequently, students from sparsely populated districts had a better chance of getting into the university system than those from densely populated districts. My grades were good enough; however, because of other criteria, I could not join. This situation was devastating for me since all my hopes and goals were based on getting into university.

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<sup>6</sup> Bennis, p. 50.

I felt rejected and had to make changes—number one being looking for other programs. I knew I was capable of pursuing further studies, so that drove me to make changes. In the end, I managed to secure a place at the university, but it was a difficult transition.

Similarly, think about when you have a friend who does not have good behavior. Do you just let this friend behave badly in your presence, or do you help make changes for the better? If you know yourself, you will do anything and everything for others. If they do not want to change, you adjust your interactions because you do not want to be involved in poor behavior.

When people know themselves, they make changes in behavior to better themselves, regardless of what others think. Throughout life, people make changes based on life's changes, sometimes to survive, sometimes to improve quality of life, and sometimes because their own or someone else's behavior is no longer acceptable.

### **Knowing Yourself Brings Freedom and Happiness**

When you know yourself, you do not have time to play and pretend that everything is fine if it is not. From the moment you know and accept yourself, you become a free individual who can discuss anything about yourself with anybody. If you do not know yourself, life is a misery because you pretend to be someone other than the real you. People who do not know themselves live a double life and pretend to others that they are doing fine, but deep down, they are being eaten alive. When you know yourself, you are free, and that is when true happiness begins. A lack of self-knowledge leaves one vulnerable to mistakes and accidents.

Through experiences and interactions with diverse people from all over the world, I have become more aware of myself. This journey of

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self-awareness is long and filled with obstacles. When I was enrolled in a doctoral program, I would always call myself a doctor, even though I knew I was a long way from finishing my studies. Anything could have happened. For example, I could have been withdrawn on academic grounds or I could have failed altogether. Because of pride, I would introduce myself as Dr. Teddie Malangwasira, even though deep down I knew I did not deserve the title yet.

When people questioned if I was still in school, I would make excuses to justify my lies. I was not free because I knew I was using the title incorrectly. In fact, I was falsifying my true identity, and I was a slave of those lies. Freedom came when I fully defended my doctoral thesis, walked on the stage, and was recognized by Regent University as having satisfied all the conditions for earning a doctorate degree. At that moment, I knew myself to be Dr. Teddie Malangwasira, and understanding how I felt when I had lied gave me incentive to be true to myself and others. I was free from the lies; I was happy.

I share this information so you will understand how knowing yourself brings happiness and freedom. Had I not succeeded in my goal, I would have had a lot of explaining to do. But had I just known myself and stated firmly I was working toward my doctorate, I would have been free from the lies in the first place.

What about you? Do you have some things that prevent you from realizing your freedom? Or are you not happy because you do not know yourself? If that is the case, you need to dive deeper into your personal life so you can know yourself and gain the freedom and happiness you deserve.

### **Knowing Yourself Helps You Accept and Understand Others**

I have seen and heard people condemning others who look normal,

yet park in a handicap parking space. They will say things like, “Why is that person parking in the handicap parking space? He looks fine to me.” Not all handicaps are visible. In fact, a handicap parking permit requires a compelling reason and evidence. When individuals know themselves, they understand they are different from others and, therefore, are more tolerant. Conversely, lack of self-awareness makes it impossible to tolerate and understand what others are going through.

I observed and learned to tolerate other people from multiple sources—one being my father-in-law. He appears normal to everyone; he walks and has a life full of happiness. So I was taken by surprise when I learned he has a handicap sticker on his car. I didn’t fully understand why he would need one because he has no visible signs of impairment. However, my father-in-law has a tough time breathing because he has Alpha-1 Antitrypsin Deficiency, an inherited disorder that can cause lung and liver disease. His disease makes it hard for him to breathe when he walks; he uses a lot of energy moving from place to place compared to people who do not have this disease. At one point, he told me he had a sticker that said, “Sick lungs don’t show.”

I laughed at this remark, but it made me adjust my viewpoint. I started to understand why he would not do certain things with the family. I realized and accepted his challenges because I now understood the differences that existed between my father-in-law and myself. If I did not know myself, I would have a tough time accepting and understanding what my father-in-law goes through. Perhaps I would have behaved differently toward him if I had been less self-aware. However, this is not the case because I accept his disability and understand what I have to do to help out and be part of the family.

Knowing yourself helps you understand others. Once you know yourself, you are in a better position to understand others’ behaviors and accept (or reject) them without prejudice. You can then enter into a relationship with anyone without any problems because you

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know your weaknesses and strengths, and they help you understand and accept others. Your behavior is different from others' and recognizing people's differences helps you accept and understand the limitations of an ever-growing number of people.

### **STEPS FOR KNOWING YOURSELF**

You have probably heard of personality or psychometric assessments that people take to find out who they are. In fact, most companies in America use these assessments for individuals to help them with career placement, growth, and development. There is nothing wrong with taking these assessments. However, they either confirm what an individual already knows, or are useless because most people are not honest when they take them. If these assessments are used for pre-employment purposes, the prospective employee will not take a chance of exposing weaknesses to the potential employer through the assessment. People will do anything and everything to look good, depending on the job they are applying for. In addition, most people who have truthfully taken the personality assessments are not surprised by their results because they already know what to expect. Results are there just to confirm a few things that might have been unclear. Those administering these tests should be well-trained to interpret results without bias and be aware of the acquiescence effects of these tests (the reluctant acceptance of something without protest) because that can impact everyone involved.

True self-discovery requires that five fundamental steps be taken to know yourself at a deeper level. I have used these steps as a father, husband, teacher, friend, neighbor, and Doctor of Philosophy.

#### **Step 1: Stop and Think**

Have you ever wondered why there are stop signs on the road? What



would happen if you disregarded all the stop signs and just kept going? Most likely, you would be involved in an accident. Stop signs are there to control the flow of traffic and tell us who has the right of way. They keep us safe and help us get where we are going. The same road sign principles apply when you are on your journey of self-discovery. You need to stop, look at the current situation, look back at your past, and look both ways (at your options) before proceeding. Questions to ask at this stage might include:

- What have I accomplished?
- In what areas do I face challenges?
- What am I doing?
- What have I done in the past?
- Am I happy?
- Why am I successful (or not successful)?
- What are my desires?
- Why am I asking all these questions?
- What kind of person am I characteristically attracted to in love?
- What difficult patterns of behavior am I prey to in relationships?
- What are my strengths?
- What are my weaknesses?
- What are my talents?
- What are my soft spots?
- What frustrates me the most?
- What do I do when I am frustrated?
- How do I control my emotions?

The list of questions can go on until they are exhausted. I have provided just a snapshot here of questions that can be asked depending

on your situation. The problem is you cannot ask these questions if you are always on the go. You need to stop and take some time to really examine yourself. Neither does this simple step require someone to ask or answer the questions for you. It is your responsibility to stop, think, ask, and answer these questions in order to get to know yourself at a deeper level. Other people may help you generate additional questions, but the self-discovery process is about you, so only you can answer these questions. It is important that at this step you do not think about the future because it will make things complicated. Only think about the past and the present.

### **Step 2: Evaluate Your Responses**

It would be unusual for a medical doctor to ask you questions about your health, take some notes, and then tell you to go home without discussing anything. Most patients would want to know what the questions meant and what the notes said. What does the doctor recommend? If the doctor did not take time to evaluate the gathered data and provide feedback, you would ask, “What type of a doctor is this?” You would probably never go back, and the doctor’s reputation would go down the drain. The same is true with the self-discovery process.

Evaluating your responses to Step 1 is an equally important step on the self-discovery journey. Once you have the responses, you need to make sense of them by fully examining them for accuracy. This important step will reveal the patterns of your life and help you have a deeper understanding of what is going on. If this step is missed, you may not look at the pertinent life issues that have led to where you are today. In addition, the evaluation step will reveal things that may have been overlooked. Once evaluations are complete, you are ready to proceed to the next step.

**Step 3: Dream About the Future**

Now that you have gone through the processes of gathering and evaluating information about your past and present, it is time to think about the future. Most people call this a vision phase. It is when you visualize what you want your future to look like. You think about how you want to shape the future so you can be successful. Your excitement for the future can be seen through your thoughts and the vision you have set for yourself.

I think of this stage as the third stage of a butterfly when it is a pupa (chrysalis) getting ready to fly as a grown butterfly. This stage is full of excitement, anxiety, emotion, and energy because one thinks of the future and dreams of a free life. It is at this stage that everyone has to be careful because some people get carried away by their emotions and might do things they will later regret. Therefore, I encourage you to dream wisely here. You do not need to dream of the successes of a brain surgeon when your training has been as a hair stylist. Any mismatch of dreams with reality should be kept in check. Certainly, anything is possible, but we need filters to help us have obtainable dreams.

Think about a time when you went to buy a car or anything you thought of as important. Did you just go into the dealership and pick a car? When I went to buy my car, I spent some time visualizing the brand, design, color, and engine capacity of the car I would buy, as well as where I would go with the car on the first day, who I was going to be with when I picked up the car, and the car's price (one I could afford). These are important details and information I needed to have before I began the conversation with a salesperson. Otherwise, I would have been carried away by the sales pitch and driven away with a car I would have regretted owning. By having the details and dreaming about what you want to have in the future, you create a solid foundation for what you want to work on as part of your self-discovery journey.

#### **Step 4: Set Goals**

By this stage, you know what your future should look like. This is the time to focus on exactly what you want to achieve. Returning to my car-buying example, I said I needed to buy a brand new, black, five-passenger car, with a sunroof, and leather interior (because I have children who might spill food and leather is easier to clean). If I deviated from those guidelines, it would not be the car I dreamed about. Certainly, I would still use the car, but it would be a modified version. If I bought the modified version, I might like it or I might complain about it because it was not the ideal car. The challenge was living with it once I bought it. Setting goals and sticking to them would help me set these concerns aside. Therefore, setting goals is an essential step in the self-discovery journey—we must be comfortable with our choices and have a solid target (goal) to shoot for if we want to understand who we are. More information on goal-setting will be discussed in detail in a later chapter. For now, just understand that goal-setting is an important part of the process of knowing yourself.

#### **Step 5: Make Connections**

It is overwhelming to see how things are connected in nature. In general, I know a direct correlation exists between the food we eat and the way we grow and behave. When I eat well, my day's activities are profitable. When I eat unhealthy food, I can tell the difference because my digestive system does not function properly; I may then tire easily or have unpredictable mood swings. We all know that by consuming certain metabolism-boosting foods and drinks, we can give our body a kick-start in calorie burning and speed up slow metabolisms. For example, eating a healthy, whole-food, plant-based diet, featuring almonds, beans, and berries boosts our metabolism. At the same time, the connection between drinking and behavior is undeniable. It confirms my belief in the connections in things in

nature. As a biology teacher, I know no energy is wasted; it changes from one form to another.

Similar to the connections we gain from the food knowledge discussed, I've learned that the connections we make with people are also important in our journey of self-discovery. These connections help us discuss and understand the changes we are making in ourselves. We may also need additional help from experts who can guide and direct us along the right path.

It is important to communicate our vision and goals with others so they can be there for us while we are fulfilling our vision and accomplishing our goals. It is impossible to achieve everything by ourselves. Others are an important part of this self-discovery journey, and their roles start with our connections.

You may need mentors to act as examples, but you may also need to inspire others on your journey; you may need to attract additional talent to help you. All these activities need some connections. Therefore, connecting with others is an important step in the self-discovery journey.

There are many advantages to knowing one's self. Leaders who know themselves are better positioned to influence others in a positive way because they understand how to accept others' behavior and respond effectively when they are facing simple or challenging situations.

Knowing yourself is also important for followers because following is the first step to becoming a leader. Leaders who know themselves treat followers with respect because they understand they are different and have their own challenges. In addition, self-aware leaders understand their limitations and that they will need others to help if they are going to be successful.

Remember, no leader lives in isolation because leadership is about

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influencing others. Therefore, knowing yourself is an important step in beginning your leadership journey because you cannot lead others if you have no idea who you are as a person. Your lack of self-awareness will scare everyone on your team. In fact, lack of self-awareness will cause you to believe in things that are unrealistic; you will then set goals that cannot be achieved or are unclear, and as a result, you will have no clear sense of direction. Lack of self-awareness makes us try to do things we cannot do and then we become frustrated when we do not achieve the intended results. However, once you know yourself, you are on a great journey that will lead to successes.

Knowing yourself is a critical step in helping you embrace diversity in your organization. It is impossible to effectively grow, develop, and include others if you have no idea who you are. This is why the self-discovery process is essential. This important step is typically followed by setting goals. Goal-setting will be discussed in the next chapter.

**PERSONAL APPLICATION**

Answer the following questions as thoughtfully and accurately as you can:

1. What do you know about yourself? (list your likes, dislikes, strengths, weaknesses, etc.)

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2. What challenges do you have around knowing yourself?

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3. What steps have you taken to know yourself?

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4. What concerns do you have about knowing yourself?

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5. How has knowing yourself helped you create realistic goals?

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