

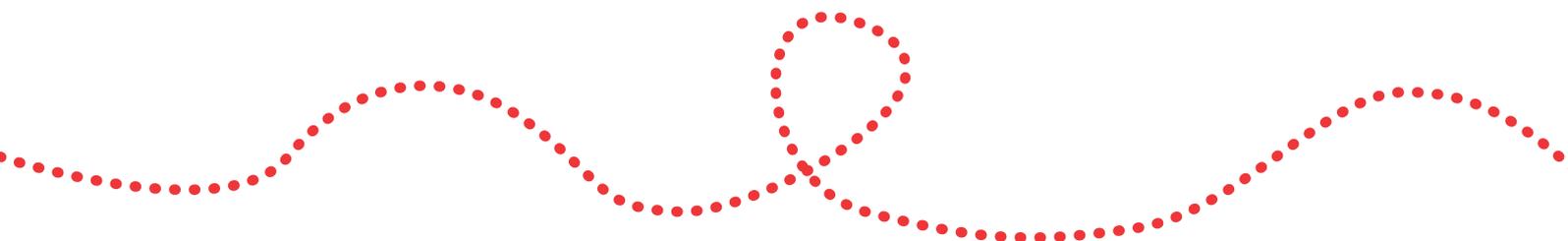
Strengths – Know Thyself

The Art of Self-Awareness



In philosophy of self, self-awareness is the experience of one's own personality or individuality. It is not to be confused with self-consciousness. While consciousness is being aware of one's environment and body and lifestyle, self-awareness is the recognition of that awareness. Self-awareness is how an individual consciously knows and understands their own character, feelings, motives and desires. There are two broad categories of self-awareness: internal self-awareness and external self-awareness

Self-awareness involves monitoring our stress, thoughts, emotions, and beliefs. It is important, because it's a major mechanism influencing personal development. Our lives can get out-of-control pretty fast if we are unaware of how and under what circumstances our emotional nature is triggered (for example, we might not realise how much social media upset us).



When it comes to work, there are three aspects of self-awareness that are particularly important.

- 1 Self-Awareness of your triggers and your reactions to them.
- 2 Self-Awareness of how you're landing with others.
- 3 Self-Awareness of how your routine behaviour impacts your future opportunities.

How Do We Increase Self-Awareness?

Self-awareness requires self-examination. Be aware, though, that an honest, non-judgmental self-analysis isn't easy. We tend to berate ourselves for our failings or fantasize about how great we are, when neither is actually the case.

We all have a unique mix of "good" and "bad" traits, but we are largely unaware of them. In order to self-reflect objectively, we need to quiet our minds and open our heart, forgive ourselves for our imperfections and offering ourselves kudos, but only where we deserve them.

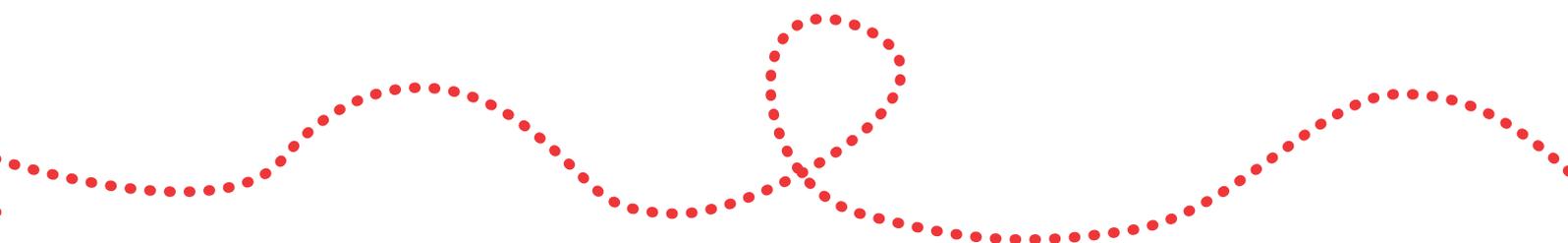
Increasing self-awareness of false attitudes or inappropriate behaviours requires peace of mind, time, attention, and focus. Knowing ahead of time that we can indeed change in positive ways through deeper self-awareness makes it worth working on those personal qualities we most value. But first, we must look within ourselves through self-examination to see what's there, which is often less obvious than we think.

Why Does Self-Awareness Matter?

High self-awareness is a solid predictor of good success in life, perhaps because a self-aware person knows when an opportunity is a good fit for them and how to make it work. Quite frankly, most of us are running on "autopilot," hardly aware of why we succeed or fail, or why we behave as we do. Our minds are so busy with daily chatter that we usually only self-reflect when something goes awfully wrong.

Perhaps we stumble through a job interview or academic test we thought we were well prepared for, or we handle something in our lives awkwardly that we assumed we were good at, or perhaps we lose a romantic partner over some misunderstanding where feelings got hurt.

Our response in challenging situations is often to get defensive, make excuses, or blame another person, because we don't want to see our own part in the disaster. If we can observe ourselves during such incidents, it will be a good start to self-awareness.



How Do We Build Self-Awareness?

Here are some suggestions to start building self-awareness:

1 Walking, especially in the quiet of nature, can be useful in building self-awareness.

The mind tends to wander along with our feet, so with a little conscious nudging (and walking), we can examine our part in something that is happening in our lives now—at work, in social situations, in our relationships, or within the family.

2 Practicing mindfulness can increase self-awareness.

Mindfulness is similar to self-awareness in that they both relate to consciously directing our thoughts inward in order to become more aware of our inner state of being, to observe our thoughts and beliefs, and to notice what triggers our emotions as they rise and fall.

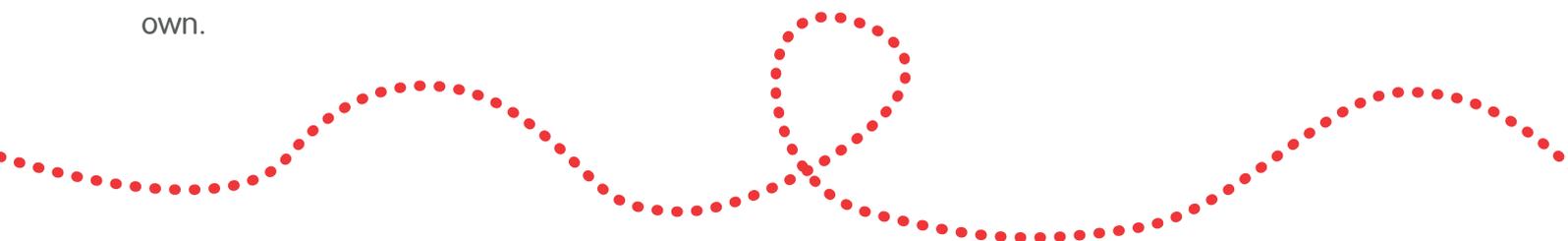
Mindfulness includes focused attention in the moment to whatever one is doing and involves practices such as meditation or a quieting of the mind.

3 Becoming a good listener can increase self-awareness.

“Getting out of ourselves” by focusing on another person is a good antidote to stop downward spirals of self-destructive thinking. By being open to someone else, we can learn to listen objectively, even lovingly, to what that person wants or needs to share. This, in turn, helps teach us how to listen to our own inner dialogues and opinions objectively and lovingly as well.

4 Becoming more self-aware can be quite enlightening.

There is so much we don't know about our inner thoughts and processes that the inward journey at times can be surprising. Sometimes certain phrases come out automatically to reveal attitudes or opinions that we don't even realise we subscribe to, or even know where they came from. Over the years of being submerged in a family, a school, various jobs, and a social milieu, we absorb prevailing ideas from our environment, and some of these get buried in our subconscious, where they often don't get examined until we inadvertently blurt them out, at times to our own embarrassment. This is one good reason why it behoves us to become more self-aware... to learn how to be ourselves, and to feel more confident that the ideas we are expressing are really our own.



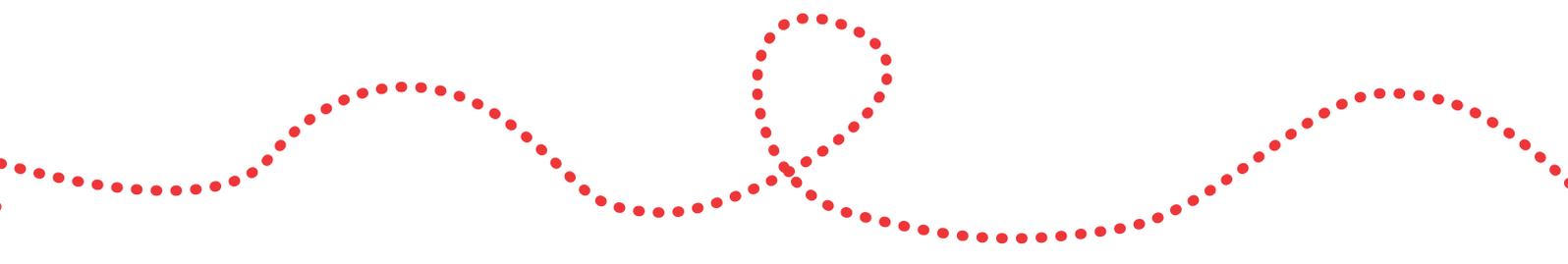
5**Self-awareness can open your mind to new perspectives.**

We each tend to have different perspectives on a variety of topics, but as we develop these perspectives, we develop our self-concept, get comfortable with ourselves, and have a preference for our own opinions. However, limited perspectives lead to limited thinking, so by being open to the views of others, we can expand our perspectives to be more universally inclusive. New ideas are refreshing and stimulating, opening our thinking in new and possibly promising directions, perhaps helping us to self-actualise. Open-mindedness is definitely a plus in being successful at dealing with life's challenges and diverse situations.

6**Self-awareness is connected to self-esteem.**

Very often the opinion we hold of ourselves is based on what others think, or more correctly, on what we think others think about us. If we were criticised often as children, we may develop a case of low self-esteem and sensitivity to rejection as a result. On the other hand, if we were praised as a "prince or princess," we are likely to develop high self-esteem, whether deserved or not. So much of our beliefs are buried in the subconscious, where they can do irreparable harm if not examined and re-calibrated to more correctly reflect who we really are.

We owe it to ourselves to become more self-aware of the thoughts and beliefs within. The subconscious holds these ideas and beliefs to be true, so if not examined, we could become a mere sponge for the societal popular mindsets and lose much of our uniqueness. Self-awareness can improve our self-esteem because we will know who we are and what we believe, which empowers us to move forward through life with a strong rudder to guide us along our chosen path.



7

Self-awareness can help you look at yourself objectively.

Humans tend to be critical beings, whether self-critical or hard on others, and sometimes both. By beating ourselves up, we serve no one and harm our well-being. And since no one is perfect, why should we expect ourselves to be? So learn to cut through the hype and become more objective, especially about yourself. Yes, there will always be areas where we can improve, but that won't happen if we refuse to take the extra time to develop self-awareness.

When you are alone with your thoughts, there's no reason to take sides. Simply be willing to evaluate yourself as objectively as possible. Be sure not to gloss over what you'd rather not see, but rather mine the subconscious for its opinions and correct the mindsets that are not compatible with your values. You can do this by being completely honest with yourself, and when you find something that is out-of-sync, examine that position, remove what isn't personally compatible, and insert a better value or phrase to bring the idea in alignment with your core values.

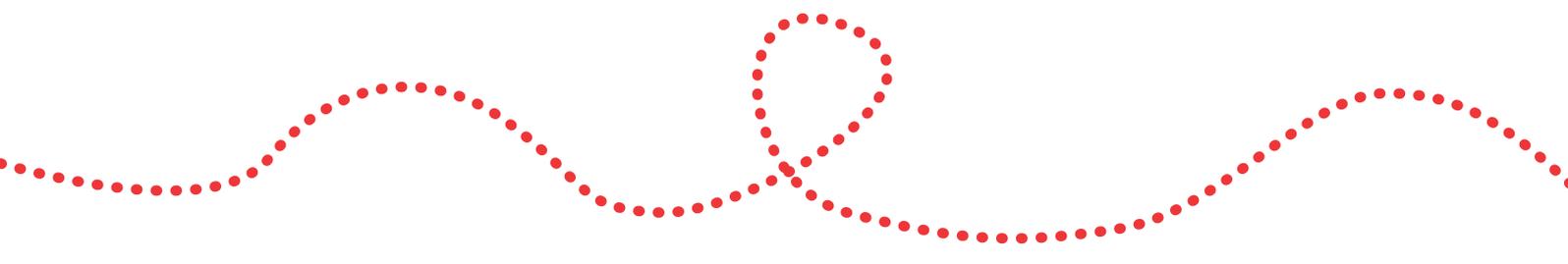
Do it like you are a teacher correcting a student—not with disdain, but with understanding and compassion.

8

Journaling is a good way to become more self-aware.

By writing your thoughts or stream-of-consciousness ideas, you begin opening up to those vulnerable places within. It is here that the mother lode of self-awareness dwells. Journaling isn't everybody's cup of tea, but if you like to write, try it out.

Writing sometimes reveals what contemplation does not, so this method of self-reflection may assist you in expanding your self-awareness. Telling your story, releasing your woes on paper, dreaming up your fantasy situation—these are ways your subconscious can speak to you, revealing what's really "the matter." Let your mind be free and marvel at what it may reveal about you and some of your buried wounds that are crying out for healing. Work with some of these ideas to explore what's behind them with the intention of knowing yourself more intimately.



9

Feedback from others can help you be more self-aware.

Since we are our own best audience, we may miss something in our self-appraisal. That's where the objectivity of others can be most helpful in self-assessment. If you have the courage, ask a friend or acquaintance their opinion of you, or ask about how you managed some project you worked on together or how you handled yourself in some quirky situation.

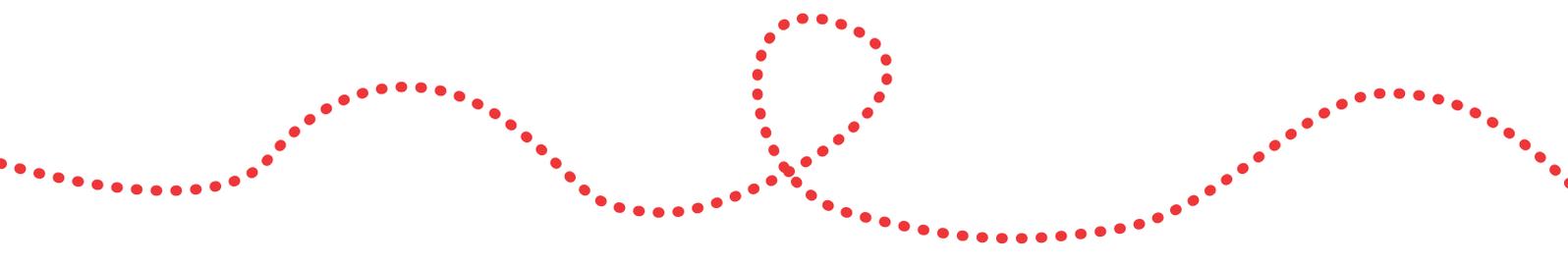
Constructive criticism is best, of course, but try to be resilient and willing to hear what they have to say. Communication in relationships is extremely important, but you must be open to listening to each other, even when what is said is said imperfectly or is hard to hear. When some aspect of self is revealed that could use some additional refinement, be willing to look behind the obvious to its underlying secret or wound. When you find something that needs some re-tweaking, make a mental or written note to yourself to look at it later when you have some time alone for your self-care.

If, on further examination, criticism does not appear to be true, consider if they are projecting onto you what they themselves are "guilty" of or struggle with. Perhaps that person is holding a grudge. If so, practice listening to what they have to say, and rather than responding defensively, try to get to the bottom of the issue so you can assure a healthy friendship.

10

Self-awareness can help you know your strengths and weaknesses.

"I'm a good starter, but I have more difficulty finishing a project." "It's easy for me to meet new people, but I have reservations when it comes to commitment." "I'm a great friend, but I'm not so good at saving money." We all have strengths and weaknesses, preferences and aversions, and whatever they are, just be aware of them so you don't put yourself in situations where you are unlikely to succeed. Use your strengths to succeed in life, and your path will be happier because you will find appreciation and support along the way.



If we wander through life without purpose or direction, chances are we will end up nowhere in particular. In order to form an intention, you really need some idea about what is important to you and what you hope to accomplish. It's not necessary to know how you are going to get there, but you must have some idea of your general direction. For instance: "I intend to create my own business in _____ (whatever field) and become self-sufficient by age ____"; "I intend to find the right life partner and raise a happy and healthy family together in the country"; "I intend to stand up for myself when my boss tries to make me feel insignificant"; etc.

Say your intention out loud and proud, remembering that you are speaking to your inner self, your subconscious, perhaps your higher consciousness, or possibly even to some higher power of your choosing to let them, and you know that you are focused on a certain direction or destination. Use these ideas to communicate with your inner self, letting your subconscious know that you want to better understand your inner mind so that you can live a more meaningful and satisfying life.

