



Check Your Blind Side (4 ideas to improve your EQ) **Bruce E. Roselle, PhD**

Last week, I was once again cut off and nearly struck by a car driven by someone who failed to check his blind side. Instead, he just slashed across a lane of traffic squinting into his side-view mirror and assuming that everything he needed to know could be seen from there.

Don't they teach people in driver's education to turn their heads and check their blind side anymore? Don't drivers realize that there is critical information—possibly life or death—in that simple over-the-shoulder look?

While it may be less important to check your blind side when you drive one of the new high-tech vehicles with blind side alerts and automatic braking, it is still critically important to check your blind side(s) at work. Having coached executives for 30 years, it is clear to me that everyone has blind sides. Most do not regularly check them.

What do I mean by a blind side at work? Being too aggressive or passive in conflicts, procrastinating on decisions, talking over people in discussions, treating others in a dismissive or demeaning manner, and being excessively quiet and close to the vest are examples of blind side behaviors. That is, people are often blind to others' reactions when they exhibit such behaviors.

Much like drivers who only check their side mirror, most people only ask a few trusted others at work how they think they are doing and what they could do to improve. They do not dig deeper to determine what their blind sides might be or how they could be more effective. Sometimes, these blind sides are referred to in performance reviews, with words like "people skills" or "results focus", but often they are not addressed directly by one's manager. Moreover, people tend to become defensive when others bring up their blind sides, because, well, they are not aware of them—hence the term 'blind side'.

The problem is that these blind sides often become obstacles to your emotional intelligence (EQ) with others, and, ultimately, to your career success. What can you do to make sure your blind sides--much like bad breath or body odor--are not sending signals to others that undermine their perception of you?

These four ideas should help:

1. Become committed and open to learning about your blind sides and addressing them, recognizing that everyone has them. People are much more likely to give you feedback and coaching about these if they can see that you are open to their perspective and committed to putting new approaches into practice.
2. Identify a set of 10-12 others at various levels in your organization (boss, peers, direct reports, others), and ask them what they think your primary strengths are in your role, as well as your developmental needs. The advantage of this approach is that it is usually fast and inexpensive; the downside is that these folks might not be comfortable enough to tell you the whole truth.
3. Or, contact your Human Resources department to ask that they conduct an online 360 degree feedback instrument on you that will anonymously contact your boss, peers, direct reports, and others to ask them about your strengths and weaknesses. I use the FULLVIEW Feedback Inventory, an online instrument I developed about 20 years ago. This approach provides a much more in-depth set of data and comments, and, because it is anonymous, makes it more likely that you would receive honest responses.
4. Whatever approach you take to getting honest feedback, be committed to learning and growing from it. If you feel stuck in trying to make changes on your own, work with an executive coach. Read books like **Fearless Leadership**—my 2006 book—that help you recognize what pushes your blind side buttons and how to move from reacting to responding.

The good news is that these blind side behaviors are usually just approaches you have adopted over the years that can be un-learned and replaced by more effective behaviors. Identifying and working through them will improve your EQ and your career trajectory.