

By Randy Emelo

The Aware Leader

In today's turbulent world, you are asked to manage increasing complexity. By vigilantly practicing the skill of awareness, you can make the most of emerging possibilities.

Supply management professionals need to anticipate the unexpected. Those who possess finely honed awareness skills can accomplish this and make the most of the rapidly changing circumstances in our world.

Awareness allows us to tune into ourselves and our environment. With internal awareness, we can understand our own emotional state, personal preferences, competencies and limitations. With external awareness, we can understand the context that surrounds us and the impact our decisions have on others.

Four guiding principles can assist supply management leaders on the journey to becoming more aware:

1) Be mindful. Awareness relies on the leader being in the moment. This sounds easy, but in practice it can be difficult. Our minds process information so quickly that we may struggle to stay in the present when interacting with others. To counter this, we need to bring our attention back to the present when it starts to drift, and halt judgments as they begin to form. This shows respect for the person speaking or the people involved in the situation.

2) Solicit feedback. We need to understand — with an open mind — how others perceive our motivations and contributions. Seeking feedback from others can include not only asking our teams for comments, but also soliciting our peers and trusted advisers for their opinions.

3) Question beliefs. Beliefs — those strongly held convictions about how things are or how they work — can help supply management leaders make decisions quickly and consistently. Unfortunately, beliefs can also cause us to not ask critical questions at opportune times. The difficulty lies in knowing when to question our beliefs. A starting point is to pay attention to opposition and to what disquiets us, because new insight and innovation are often found in that which disturbs us.

4) Face failures. Failures and setbacks can offer powerful lessons to supply management leaders, revealing truths, building understanding and helping us become flexible in our thought processes. Self-analysis and probing what went wrong can help us uncover misunderstandings and see emerging and overlooked truths. But use caution when analyzing failures. These

reflections should be focused on the principles, methods, procedures and preconceived notions that need to be modified in order to get the results you want, not on personality assassinations or playing the blame/shame game.

Supply management leaders who practice awareness effectively will see unique possibilities as they develop and are able to respond to changing situations with the proper degree of urgency. They work with others to make sense of current reality and leverage emerging potential into lasting results, yet they never lose their humility or ability to openly question their own thought processes and perceptions. Perhaps most important, in the wake of failure, they can ruthlessly identify and examine the root causes and learn from them.

Cultivating awareness is a lifelong process and can be challenging. Every day we have the opportunity to learn more, but it takes a solid resolve to walk this path. **ISM**

Randy Emelo is president and CEO of Triple Creek Associates in Greenwood Village, Colorado. He writes a monthly newsletter on mentoring and is the author of numerous articles and research papers. For more information, send an e-mail to author@ism.ws.