

## Recognizing our Blind Spots...

### (The Impact of Self-Awareness on Pastoral Wellness, Self-Care and Leadership)

Blind spots. We all have them. Those aspects of our personality, motivations, behaviors, emotions or skill gaps that we may not be actively aware of, but that can get in the way of our ministry, our relationships, our wellness. Moreover, blind spots seem to pick the most inopportune times to reveal themselves – often when we are under stress or under pressure. As a business executive/professional manager, I have seen more careers derailed due to a lack of self-awareness, or blind spots, than any other skill gap. Unfortunately, as a lay leader I have also seen the negative impact of blind spots on pastors' lives, their wellness, and their callings.

As leaders, our blind spots don't just impact our lives – they impact the lives of those around us. Parker Palmer notes, "A leader is a person who must take special responsibility for what's going on inside him or herself, inside his or her consciousness, lest the act of leadership create more harm than good."<sup>1</sup> In short, as leaders we are called to do the work to shine light on our blind spots, to understand them, and to work to minimize the damage they can cause.

While our blind spots can reside within a number of areas within our personalities and skill sets, I would like to highlight four common sources within each of us.

First, many of us have blind spots when we have not internalized our weaknesses. It is a fact that each of us have God-given gifts or strengths, and we also have areas where we are weaker or less developed. The questions to ask are: "How accurate is my self-view?" and "Do I understand what my weaknesses are and what impact that has on me, my leadership, my wellness, and on others?" Pastor Mandy Smith encourages us to embrace our weaknesses as "gifts from God", as opportunities to vulnerably lead through the example to others of needing and relying on God's grace.<sup>2</sup> In short, being honest with ourselves, and others, about our weaknesses can be a source of connection and growth.

A second common source of self-awareness gaps relates to not recognizing our personal limits and the need for healthy margins in our lives. In *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives*, Richard Swenson notes that all things have limits, and as individuals we need limits in several ways: physical, emotional, intellectual, and relational, among others. Not recognizing our limits and exceeding them (Swenson calls this "living without margin") is ignoring the fact that God created us with limits for our own protection. As Swenson notes, "we exceed them at our peril."<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, many of us operate without margin without recognizing we are doing so – with disastrous effects for ourselves and for others.



One common blind spot source, which is easily but unfortunately not frequently addressed, is not understanding your personality type – specifically, how others see you or how you impact others. You have likely taken one or more of the various personality assessments in the past (Myers-Briggs, Enneagram, DiSC, others). If you are like me, the results from these assessments often seemed tremendously insightful when I received them, but then they soon became lost in a file drawer -- not to be rediscovered until my next deep cleaning exercise. The key question is when was the last time that you reviewed and reflected on the results from these assessments? How actively have you synthesized the results? How does your personality impact your self-care and wellness? How does it impact those you live with? Those you work with? Those you lead? What characteristics does your personality type tend to exhibit when under pressure? While none of the assessments are likely to provide a 100% accurate read into your specific personality, the level of insight they can provide – particularly relative to blind spots – can be quite impactful.

Finally, one of the most frequent and powerful areas of blind spots are the shadow motivations that reside in each of us – “the inner urges, compulsions and dysfunctions of our personality”<sup>4</sup> as Gary McIntosh and Samuel Rima note. We are all a product of our unique background and circumstances, including family of origin, upbringing, failures, wounds, difficulties and tragedies. These shadow factors impact us and drive us – often unconsciously or subconsciously. Whether we invest the time and energy to become self-aware and to understand these emotions or whether we rationalize them away or ignore them makes a tremendous impact on our lives and on how we impact others.

So how do we address our blind spots that are negatively impacting our wellness, our self-care, and our leadership? Let me offer a few suggestions.

First, intentionality is essential. We need to IDENTIFY our blind spots, actively seeking them out so we can know them and become aware of them. As Terry Linhart notes “God can use cracked pots to carry valuable treasure (2 Cor 4:7). But unless we’re intentional, no one will talk to us about these blind spots, these areas where we are inconsistent with the Spirit of Christ and His ministry.”<sup>5</sup> We can identify our blind spots through using an internal or personal lens (through reflection, journaling, personality or psychological assessments, solitude, etc.). We can also use an external or communal lens to help us (a spiritual director or mentor, staff or key lay leaders, friends, family, colleagues, etc.).

Second, I think it helps to NAME our blind spot. By naming it we reduce the power it holds over us. Naming allows our blind spot to become a conscious part of our personality rather than a hidden animal, waiting to appear at inopportune times. Moreover, naming is also critical to sharing our self-insight with others in an open, vulnerable manner – which in turn creates connection, culture and accountability.

Finally, we need to actively work to PROCESS and INTEGRATE our blind spot. How might this be affecting me? Others? My walk with God? Where might this be coming from? How might my shadow be driving this? What resources can I utilize to help me process this? Am I courageous enough to vulnerably share this with others to ask for their support?

Richard Rohr noted, “You cannot heal what you cannot acknowledge.”<sup>6</sup> We cannot address the detrimental effect that our blind spots have on our wellness, self-care and our leadership until we commit to bringing them into the light.



## Reflection Questions:

- What blind spots do you have that might be getting in the way of your leadership or of the satisfaction you derive from your ministry?
- How well do you know your shadow side, how it developed and how it motivates you (positively and negatively)? How does your shadow impact your leadership style and your wellness?
- How might you better identify and better address your blind spots? What resources or support do you need? What action steps are you willing to commit to?

## About The Author:

Chris Clark is a strategic, passionate, faith-based, retired executive with over 20 years of executive leadership with a successful global med-tech company, as well as extensive lay leadership experience. Chris seeks to help address what he refers to as “The Crisis in Comprehensive Pastoral Health” through public and lay advocacy, and by walking alongside pastors in individual mentoring relationships focused on providing leadership and management insights. You can learn more about Chris and his ministry, Northern ELM Mentoring Group, at [www.NorthernElmMentoringGroup.com](http://www.NorthernElmMentoringGroup.com).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Palmer, Parker. (1990, March). *Leading From Within: Reflections on Spirituality and Leadership*. Annual Celebration Dinner of the Indiana Office for Campus Ministries.

<sup>2</sup>Smith, M. (2015). *The Vulnerable Pastor: How Human Limitations Empower Our Ministry*. InterVarsity Press.

<sup>3</sup>Swenson, R. A. (2004). *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives*. NavPress.

<sup>4</sup>McIntosh, G. L., & Rima, S. D. (2007). *Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership: How to Become an Effective Leader by Confronting Potential Failures*. Baker Books. p28.

<sup>5</sup>Linhart, T. (2017). *The Self-Aware Leader: Discovering Your Blind Spots to Reach Your Ministry Potential*. InterVarsity Press. 11.

<sup>6</sup>Rohr, R. (2011). *Breathing Under Water: Spirituality and the Twelve Steps*. Franciscan Media.

## Additional Resources:

If you are interested in reading more about pastoral self-care, including the importance of self-awareness for healthy self-care and effective leadership and management, I recommend the following resources:

- *The Self-Aware Leader: Discovering Your Blind Spots to Reach Your Ministry Potential* (InterVarsity Press) by Terry Linhart.
- *Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership: How to Become an Effective Leader by Confronting Potential Failures* (Baker Books) by Gary McIntosh and Samuel Rima.
- Assessments to Assist in Developing Self-Awareness and Identifying Blind Spots:
  - *Saboteurs/Positive Intelligence (free assessment) available at [www.positiveintelligence.com/assessments](http://www.positiveintelligence.com/assessments)*
  - *Everything DiSC Profile (available through Northern ELM Mentoring Group for a modest cost)*



- *Enneagram Profile (free assessment) available at [www.truity.com/test/enneagram-personality-test](http://www.truity.com/test/enneagram-personality-test)*

In addition, the Pastoral Respite Ministry at Silver Bay YMCA (Silver Bay, NY) offers online Pastoral Self-Care Cohorts where groups of pastors come together to support each other and explore different wellness topics. Please contact Rev. Garth Allen ([gallen@silverbay.org](mailto:gallen@silverbay.org)) or Rev. Bruce Tamlyn ([btamlyn@silverbay.org](mailto:btamlyn@silverbay.org)) if you are interested in joining a pastoral self-care cohort or in initiating a spiritual direction relationship to further support your self-care efforts.

Finally, if you are interested in exploring either a short-term or ongoing mentoring relationship to strengthen your leadership and management skills, please contact Chris Clark of Northern Elm Mentoring Group (email to [ChrisClark@NorthernElmMentoringGroup.com](mailto:ChrisClark@NorthernElmMentoringGroup.com)). All mentoring engagements are conducted on a pro-bono basis, with the request that participants prayerfully consider a donation to Silver Bay YMCA's Pastoral Respite Program in lieu of mentoring fees.

