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Triple Impact Practitioners’ Program

Conscious Use of Self: An Introduction

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# What is Conscious Use of Self?

As we have mentioned, Use-of-Self is the core of our model. Use-of-Self is all about you, learning about yourself in action. Most of us live our lives with little awareness of how we use ourselves. We do what comes automatically, while focusing on the work and not the impact of our choices or actions. Conscious use of self focuses on understanding our beliefs, assumptions, perceptions and actions and how they impact our interactions with others. Awareness of these aspects of ourselves enables us to make better choices about how we interact with others. We believe we have control of the choices we make. We choose to act or not to act. We also choose how we act. Use-of-Self is a competency that leads you to be more aware, conscious, and choiceful with your actions and intentions.

# What Do We Mean by Aware and Unaware Use of Self

Conscious Use-of-Self is intentional and self-aware. When we behave in a way that is routine and reactive we are unaware, on automatic. When we are aware, we are conscious, in tune to what we are doing in the moment. We are consciously aware of information, our behavior and actions as we experience them. As a result, we are better able to make conscious, intentional choices. In both situations we are taking in information from our environment and making choices. When we are unaware, on automatic, the information enters our system and we respond without even thinking about it or our response to it. Being unaware, on automatic, as we react gives us the illusion that we don't have a choice, because we often fail to recognize that even on automatic we are the ones making the choices, even if we have chosen to abandon our control of those choices.

Think of how you use yourself when your cell phone rings during the middle of a conversation. Do you immediately answer it without thinking, or do you pay attention to the choices you might have about your response? On automatic, you would answer the phone without thinking. Alternatively, your Conscious Use-of-Self may take into account where you were in the conversation, your observations about other people's reactions, your Feelings about answering the phone and ultimately your decision to answer it or not. By consciously considering your choices you are more purposeful with your actions.

Why are we so often unaware, on automatic? How did we learn to look outside of ourselves for our reactions and responses? Our learning began early, innocently, as children when we really were not in control of our choices. Adults made most of our choices for us, and we often blamed these adults for our reactions and our responses. As we mature, we began to make our own choices. Consequently, even though as adults we are more than capable of making our own choices, we still revert to the child-like behavior that we are familiar with and give the control of our choices to others. The automatic reflexes and responses built into us by our socialization and our upbringing come so naturally and easily that we are unaware of the possibility of retaining control of our choices. However, knowing that, we revert to old behaviors and patterns. It is possible to become aware of when we do that, either by choice or because we have gone on automatic, and understand that we really do have a choice. Underlying our automatic responses are belief systems that mayor may not be outdated and may need to be retrieved and reexamined.

It makes sense that, as a child, we are told to do things by adults and have reactions to these requests, orders, and demands. It also makes sense to blame these adults for their control over our lives. However, as an adult, we can take responsibility for what we do, and have control over our reactions that are available to us, and make choices that were not available to us as children.

It is very difficult to stay in our adult self all the time, so we often go to the child in us, who feels that they don't have a choice and that others are controlling our choices, and then blame the others for the choices they are making for us.

If we are aware when we choose to be in control, accountable, and when we choose to give the control to others, we can understand better when we are coming from our adult self or from our child self. Both are available to us, as choices, but the child self tends to be more automatic.

# Moving Toward A Conscious Use-of-Self

Conscious Use-of-Self is a complex set of behaviors that takes more time and effort than operating on automatic. It is a mindset of continuous learning. It involves discovering, examining and updating our belief systems, being engaged and connected to others. It requires being open to observation, feedback, exploration, action and reaction. We need to keep in touch with what is happening inside and outside of ourselves, slow down the reaction process to permit ourselves to understand our choices and then monitor ourselves against our intentions and reactions. Working on Use-of-Self will seem awkward and time consuming at first, but once it is on your speedometer you will see that it becomes a way of life.

By understanding and consciously, intentionally, using ourselves, we will be able to choose our reactions and intentions in the coaching process. The story that begins on page 20 "Knowing when to Step In and Step Out" provides an example of how important conscious Use-of-Self can be to the coaching effort. Once we understand ourselves and can consciously choose how we want to react and respond to a given situation, we will be able to coach our clients, employees and others to use themselves more consciously and intentionally.

Conscious Use-of-Self is a way of approaching life that leads to increased awareness of one's unique gifts and the capacity to influence others, and to be influenced by others. We believe that Conscious Use-of-Self is a necessary competency for people in positions where they are coaching and empowering others to act.

The following Choices Awareness Matrix is a useful tool to help you understand your Use of Self in making choices.

## Choice Awareness Matrix

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Awareness | ChoiceAttributedTo Self | ChoiceAttributedTo Others |
| Aware | **ACCOUNTABLE** | BLAME |
| Unaware | **AUTOMATIC** | **SOCIALIZATION** |

When we are aware that we are in control of our choices, we can be accountable for what we choose. When we are unaware of the choices we have made, we do it automatically by pattern or habit. When we are aware of the choices, but give control of our choices to others, we blame them. When we are unaware of choosing and do something out of our being unaware, we are acting from our belief system and our socialization. We are coming from our societal inheritance.

One of our favorite phrases is that we can't change others, but we can change ourselves in how we react and adapt to other people. This mindset often creates a different dynamic or outcome.