

SUMMARY

BY ALYSSA BURNETTE

LEADERSHIP BLINDSPOTS

BY ROBERT BRUCE SHAW



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Summary of “Leadership Blindspots” by Robert Bruce Shaw

Written by Alyssa Burnette

How to overcome your professional blindspots.

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Introduction

Blind spots: we all have them. We have them when we're driving and we're taught to watch out for those little areas just outside our vision. Why? Because the things that lurk in our blind spots can hurt us if we don't identify and avoid them! Dodging things you can't see might sound like a pretty tall order, but identifying your blindspots is crucial on the road and in the workplace. Targeting your blindspots and correcting them can help you to avoid major pitfalls and prepare for success. So, over the course of this summary, we'll explore Robert Bruce Shaw's top tips for identifying and overcoming your leadership blindspots.



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Blindspots and How They Can Hurt Us

In an episode of the popular NBC sitcom *Superstore*, members of the management team conduct open interviews to find a new employee for their team. In keeping with standard interview questions, the candidates are asked things like, “What would you say is your biggest strength?” and “What is your biggest weakness?” One interviewee responds to these questions with, “I guess my biggest strength would be... physical strength. Like, lifting heavy stuff,” and, “I guess my biggest weakness is... bullets.” These answers are, of course, comedic gold because of their laughable lack of self-awareness, not to mention a lack of basic understanding. But unfortunately, these answers are also indicative of the blindness that is all too common when it comes to assessing our own faults.

Many of us are aware of a few of our more obvious shortcomings. We might know, for example, that we are always running late or that we procrastinate far more than we should. We might be aware of our long list of pet peeves. But we’re usually able to identify these things because they are the most obvious traits that reveal themselves in our everyday lives. But what about the issues that aren’t on our radar? What about the faults that are obvious to everyone but us? These are our blindspots and they are the biggest issues that we need to identify and eradicate. And don’t fall into the common trap of assuming that your blindspots will mysteriously disappear once you reach a certain level of success. In fact, the more successful you are, the more damage your blindspots can do.

For example, let’s say you’re unexpectedly given a leadership position with a lot of power and prestige. Would you let it go to your head? Or would you try to remain humble and neutral in your new role? Even if you opted for the latter answer, many people will unconsciously gravitate towards the former option. That’s because arrogance is a natural human trait; it’s easy to let success go to your head and to get carried away with thinking, “I’m the best! I can do whatever I want!” And this can often lead to catastrophic decisions that tank your career and the future of your company. For example, just

imagine that you're a police officer who's received a promotion: all of a sudden, you're the chief of the NYPD. Now that you're the head of a new regime, it might be tempting to get rid of every high-ranking official currently in office and bring in a new staff that will only be loyal to you. Sure, a lot of people won't like it, but hey-- you're the chief of the NYPD! You're in charge now and everybody has to do what you say.

But of course, it's not quite that easy. Even if you succeed in pushing your own agenda, you'll also turn the entire department against you. And in so doing, you'll make a lot of enemies. People will be reluctant to trust you, respect you, or work with you. And in the end, all you succeeded in doing was creating a lot of internal conflict, damaging your reputation, and reducing the effectiveness of your department. That doesn't sound like a great start to a new career, does it? And in this example, all of these totally avoidable issues were caused by blindspots like arrogance and selfishness. So, that's why it's vital to discover our blindspots and eliminate them before we allow them to hurt ourselves or other people.



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Mistakes Are Warning Signals

Blindspots are blindspots because we struggle to see them. So, how can we identify the faults we didn't see in the first place? The author observes that mistakes are quick and easy warning signals that help us to catch our blindspots. After all, blindspots aren't usually apparent in the things we're doing well, so mistakes are a cue that we have some room for improvement. So, keep an eye out for mistakes that you make on a regular basis and subject these failures to an in-depth critical analysis that will help you identify the deeper faults beneath the surface. To put this into context with a practical example, let's imagine that you're the founder and editor of a successful publication. You have a wide and diverse readership and a team of over 500 writers. You have new content every day and your team is growing by leaps and bounds. These are the strong points and they show that you're doing a great job with engagement, recruitment, and outreach.

But you also have these great ideas for new programs that you forget to follow through on. For example, maybe you announced that your publication would be giving out monthly awards to the best writers. And for the first two or three months, you consistently announced your winners. But now it's been six months and you've been late in your announcements or forgot to choose winners altogether. This repeated forgetfulness indicates that you're struggling with consistency and time management. And that means you have two easily identifiable blind spots! But of course, identifying your blindspots is just the first step to overcoming them. If we compare these leadership blindspots to physical illnesses, we can easily understand that knowing you need glasses isn't going to fix anything. You have to actually get a prescription for glasses and wear your corrective lenses every day if you want your vision to improve!

Likewise, personal development is a lot like wearing glasses. Once you discover your blindspots, it's important to "wear your glasses" by taking practical steps to correct them. So, in the example we just considered, you would start by identifying your weaknesses and follow up by taking action to

remedy these faults. In this case, it might be as simple as scheduling a reminder or hiring an assistant who can help you choose the winners and publish your announcement! You might also need a crash course in time management to help you make the most efficient use of your time. However, the simplicity of this example also highlights another important issue: the common temptation to ignore our blindspots. Often, when our failures are relatively small things like issues with time management, it's tempting to say, "That's not a big deal!" and ignore it. But when we do this, we also ignore the harsh reality that little problems can be very big deals further down the line.

For example, what would you do if your writers became extremely angry about the lack of monthly awards? What if they threatened to leave your publication in droves? Without your writers, you have no work to publish! And with no work to publish, your publication quickly dies. So, as you can see from this example, what seems like a very small problem can have lasting consequences. In this case, your time management blindspot is causing major issues with employee satisfaction and this can decrease your success and your positive reputation. So, it's probably in your best interest to correct every blindspot that comes to your attention-- even the ones that seem like they're no big deal!



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Feedback Can Help You Identify Blindspots

Blindspots are blindspots because they aren't obvious to us. And as we've already mentioned, it can be tough to fix issues that you can't even see. But that's why it's important to assemble every tool we can use to root out and eradicate our blindspots! In the previous chapter, we discussed one of the methods you can use to find blindspots: you can pay close attention to your frequent mistakes. But you can also rely on the feedback of others who have your best interest at heart. However, this tool might be a little tougher to embrace. After all, even when you're identifying your mistakes and admitting your own faults, at least you're the one pointing them out.

But nobody likes to be corrected by someone else. Whether it's being told that you got the answer wrong on a test or neglected an important part of your job, no one likes being told that they can improve. As a result, we tend to dread all forms of constructive criticism. And when someone tells us something that we don't want to hear, we often comfort ourselves by brushing it off with statements like, "They're just jealous!" or "They're just being mean." But the author asserts that feedback is actually invaluable--provided that it's coming from someone who has your best interest at heart. And that's why the author's next piece of advice is all about embracing the gift of feedback. The author observes that there is often a vast disparity between how other people see you and how you see yourself. This can be a wonderful thing because it means that those who work closely with you can notice blindspots that might have escaped your attention.

These people can be invaluable assets in your attempt to identify and correct your blindspots, so if they offer you some feedback, you should at least hear them out! Even though no one likes to be corrected, having a coach, mentor, or teacher who is trying to help you improve is really a gift because their advice is a free opportunity to become your best self.

However, that might be more easily said than done if you're in a leadership position. Most bosses don't respond well to being corrected by their

employees, but the author observes that your employees are often best equipped to offer helpful feedback. After all, they're most likely to feel the brunt of your blind spots! As a result, your employees might have genuinely beneficial advice that can help you improve as a leader. But if you want to take advantage of their feedback, you have to show that you're open to receiving constructive criticism. And that means quite literally asking for it! Make yourself vulnerable to your employees by telling them that you would like their feedback about what you can do to improve. Ask them how you can make their lives easier. Ask them what they think you should work on. If you approach them with kindness and sincerity, it's unlikely that they will see this as a free opportunity to rant at the boss. Instead, they will likely be impressed by your openness and vulnerability and they will feel free to communicate and provide you with honest feedback.

So, now that you know why feedback is important and how you can acquire it, you might also need some tips for gracefully receiving that feedback. The author suggests that you try to approach constructive criticism with an attitude of humility. Open yourself up to the possibility that you might not be aware of the areas in which you need to improve. Acknowledge that someone else might have some helpful insights-- and then take advantage of their advice! Once you've identified the areas in which you can improve, take this as a personal challenge to beat your own personal best. If you use this method to help you learn and grow, you'll find that your confidence and your performance will increase exponentially! In fact, as you learn and grow on a personal and professional level, you'll be well-equipped to guide your employees. You can actually use examples from your own growth journey to help them become their best selves! So, when you work at overcoming your own blindspots, you and your employees will all benefit.



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Final Summary

Everybody has blindspots--pesky little flaws and failures that evade our notice. And these unseen problems can really hurt us if we don't make a concentrated effort at finding them and rooting them out! That's why the author recommends following his blueprint for correcting your leadership blindspots. First, identify your leadership blindspots and take responsibility for the damage they can cause. Next, take an inventory of your frequent mistakes and identify the deeper issues that might be behind them. And lastly, take advantage of helpful feedback by asking your employees and colleagues to help you identify areas for improvement.



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