

Using Assessments to Understand Ourselves Better

By Katie Darden

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The most engrossing questions for me have always been “why am I here” and “what makes people tick”. The Why question is one that can only be answered on a individual basis, and after decades of exploration, I think I’m a little closer to an answer for myself.

Understanding what makes us and others “tick”, however, is something that has been widely studied. And luckily for us, there are several useful models out there that can shed a little light on the human condition and our human behaviors. In this article we’ll discuss a couple of models that may be useful for you.

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Johari Window
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One of the models we can use to begin to understand human behavior is the Johari window. This 4 quadrant matrix suggests each of us are like a house with glass outside walls and solid inside/internal walls.

To understand a Johari window, draw a box, then divide it into 2 columns and 2 rows. Basically, the horizontal axis (wall) helps us identify behaviors that are public/external (left side) or private/internal (right side). The vertical axis (wall) contains our conscious behaviors (top) and unconscious behaviors (bottom)

In the upper left quadrant is the Public Self (public/conscious) that is visible to all. The upper right is the Private Self (private/conscious), those aspects of my personality that only I am aware of. The lower left is the Hidden Self (public/unconscious) which is visible to others, but not to me. And the lower right is the Unknown Self (private/unconscious), invisible to all. (See graphic at <http://careerlifeinstitute.com/images/johari.jpg>)

We are able to see/understand our own behaviors looking in from the top side of the quadrant, which shows us both our Public and Private Selves – what we personally are consciously aware of. Other people look at us from the left side of the quadrant, seeing both the Public and the Hidden Selves – our observable behaviors. Obviously the Unknown Self, which is both private and unconscious, is simply not viewable, either by us or by others.

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Using Tools to Make it Simple

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Those of us who are coaches are in the business of helping others achieve their goals and dreams. Often this means some personal exploration to help clients get rid of blocks, access their own best behaviors, understand what they're doing that does and doesn't already work well, and then developing strategies for becoming more resourceful.

So, we looked around for some useful assessments that would assist our clients in better accessing that best within themselves. Our criteria were fairly simple: We were looking for something that was Simple to Understand, Simple to Administer, Simple to Explain, Simple to Apply, as well as something that had been used enough times for the results to be verifiable.

We came up with several assessments – including the DiSC and the MAPP – that really helped us to better understand ourselves and others. But two assessments seemed to stand out in terms of being reasonably priced and meeting our Simple Requirements: the Motivation Profile and the Platinum Rule.

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Motivation Profile

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The Motivation Profile is a self-administered workbook that examines various aspects of how we prefer to interact with the world. It's based on Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) and gives quick insight into how and why we do the things we do and get the kinds of results we get.

Aspects of our self and our interactions identified through this assessment include sensory preferences (the degree to which we process information from a visual, auditory or feeling stimulus), environmental preferences (do we focus on people, places, things, knowledge, or activities), metaprograms or motivational styles (glass half-full or half-empty, internal/external impetus, etc.), and time preferences (past, present, future), many of which are evident as part of the Unknown Self in the Johari window.

Bringing these into consciousness can often help us identify and understand areas where we are already resourceful and those where we might want to focus attention or energy to expand our options.

They also help us to understand the preferred styles of the people around us. When we are able to enter another person's world, we are better able to create connection and rapport.

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Platinum Rule

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The Platinum Rule (which modifies the Golden Rule so that we "do unto others as they would have us do unto them") is a 4 quadrant assessment from Tony Alessandra that can be administered over the internet or can be reasoned out by looking at the two dimensions described below.

The online assessment consists of 18 questions which have a range of possible answers. It is very quick to take (usually 3-5 minutes) and the results are instantaneously available.

The Platinum Rule explores behavior from 2 dimensions – Openness and Directness. How relatively open or guarded someone is, and how relatively direct or indirect the person is.

People who are Open tend to be more self-disclosing and people-oriented, where those who are more Guarded or Closed tend to be more task-oriented. Those who are more Direct tend to be faster paced risk takers, and those who are Indirect are more likely to be cautious and slower paced, valuing security over action.

So to understand this Assessment, divide your quadrant so that the vertical axis measures how Open (top) or Closed (bottom) the person is. And the horizontal axis measures how Indirect (left) or Direct (right) the person is. (See graphic at <http://careerlifeinstitute.com/images/pr.jpg>)

What you end up with are 4 quadrants where the upper left (Indirect/Open) identifies the Relaters – people who are very good at relating to others, but do not like confrontation and do not like risk. These are classic social workers, mediators, people-oriented people who want to make sure everyone is taken care of and not left out.

The upper right quadrant (Direct/Open) are the Socializers – the people who love to interact with others in a social atmosphere. They are often self-disclosing (open) and risk takers, and can be seen as somewhat flamboyant – these are our performers, artists, salespeople, our expressives. They are also people-oriented, but often because they love an audience.

The lower right quadrant (Direct/Closed) are the Directors. Directors often have that title at work, too. They are direct, driven, results-oriented people who can often be considered insensitive because they are more task- than people-oriented and do not self-disclose very much. They want results and they often use others to achieve what they want.

In the lower left quadrant (Indirect/Closed) we have the Thinkers. These are your classic technicians, accountants, engineers. They are very risk adverse, need lots and lots of data, take a long time to make a decision (accuracy is important to them) and are resistant to change. They keep us grounded and accountable. And safe.

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More Resources = Greater Flexibility = Better & Quicker Results
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As we understand ourselves more and more, we are able to tap into the incredible resources personally available. If we return to our Johari Window model for a moment we can see that this greater understanding may allow greater confidence to Publicly express more of what may have been kept Private, thus shifting the vertical axis to the right.

As we understand and access more of our own unconscious motivators and behaviors, we increase our conscious understanding, which shifts the horizontal axis downward. (See graphic at <http://careerlifeinstitute.com/images/johari2.jpg>) Once we are Conscious of behaviors and motivators, we now have the option of expressing them publicly, too. And so it goes.

Another reason the online Platinum Rule is so useful is that it provides a way to get more information about the Hidden Self. Not only can you complete the assessment for yourself, there is a unique 360 degree-like opportunity to invite an unlimited number of observers from your business and personal lives to complete the same assessment regarding how they experience you. The individual observer results are confidential, although they are plotted on a graph so the person taking the assessment can better understand how s/he is experienced by other people.

And if you're working with a group of people, you can plot a group graph of the individual styles so you better understand where you fit within the group.

Understanding the differences between how we see ourselves and how others experience us can help to shrink the Hidden Self quadrant as well as providing valuable feedback regarding our effectiveness.

And bottom line, we all want to achieve our desired results more quickly and effectively. By giving ourselves the opportunity to understand our own motivators and behaviors, and using the valuable feedback that assessments and observations can provide, we can shorten the time between desire and achievement, and increase the quality of the results we get.

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Katie Darden (mailto:Coach@CareerLifeInstitute.com) is a Business & Career Coach who loves serving as a Creative Catalyst for her clients. She regularly uses these and other assessments to accelerate her clients' self-understanding and positive growth. If you are interested in finding out more about these assessments and how they were developed, go to <http://CareerLifeInstitute.com/assessments> .

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