Earlier this year I heard a question that’s had quite an impact on me. “What’s it like to be on the other side of me?” The purpose of this question is to take a deep look at yourself from several angles, and consider, “How do people perceive me?” “How do my natural reactions, body language and overall presence impact those around me?” I found myself quietly repeating this question several times before I could truly hear it. And when it sunk in, wow, did I realize just how scary this one question is! Do I really want to know what certain people think of me? Did I truly want to confront this? Because if I do, I can’t ignore what I hear! Can’t I just live in my cozy world with kids who adore their Mommy, a husband who loves his wife, and bosses who like the results I bring to the table? But the truth is, in order for me to reach my full potential both in the office and at home, I needed to hear where I’m not firing on all cylinders.

Typically when I’ve thought of “improvement” at the office, it’s been something you can quantify. Meet and beat all deadlines, personally respond to all emails within 24 hours, etc. At home, improvement has meant getting everyone out the door in the morning without leaving any dirty dishes in the sink! Yet through this learning process I’ve surmised that to truly get the results we want in both our personal and professional lives, we need to focus on improving our relationships. I’ve come to understand how my tendency to avoid small talk at the office actually hampers my ability to motivate the team of professionals who support me. And if I did show more empathy, my clients and I would likely benefit from the results of a more productive and happy team. Why? Because we all want to be cared about, praised and guided. I’ve come to understand that just like children, adults learn through play. Letting our
guards down from time to time, opening up and interacting with others in a light and even joking environment can go farther than years of sharing an office wall, a plot of land, or even a carpool with someone. Our staff recently played together by participating in a corporate wellness program—ok a road race for the competitive ones like myself—but truly a “let your guard down” good event to see each other outside of computers and suits. The result? A memorable event with enough little inside jokes to last beyond the event itself. With this one event, our corporate “wellness” improved by one degree; imagine the results if we make some level of “playing” part of our daily routine.

Another important element I’ve concluded from this process is that timing matters. For me, fortunately this process came at a time in my life when I’ve got enough self-confidence to take critical remarks, and not be defensive, well not after a normal reactionary period. But 10 years ago when I was pretty new and naïve to corporate America, hearing any sort of negativity could feel like a brick in my shoe, rather than something I can mentally and physically work through.

Whether you are working in the professional world, or your life consists mainly of personal relationships, and/or your human connections are focused in the community, I encourage you to pose “the other side of me” question to several people who interact with you. Or, if you’re not emotionally ready to open yourself outwardly, look inside and take a guess at how others would answer this question about you. The results may be surprising, reassuring, and may even sting, but just for a little bit. Let’s face it. We all can make life better for those experiencing the other side of us. And when we do, even small changes can have big results on our relationships.

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