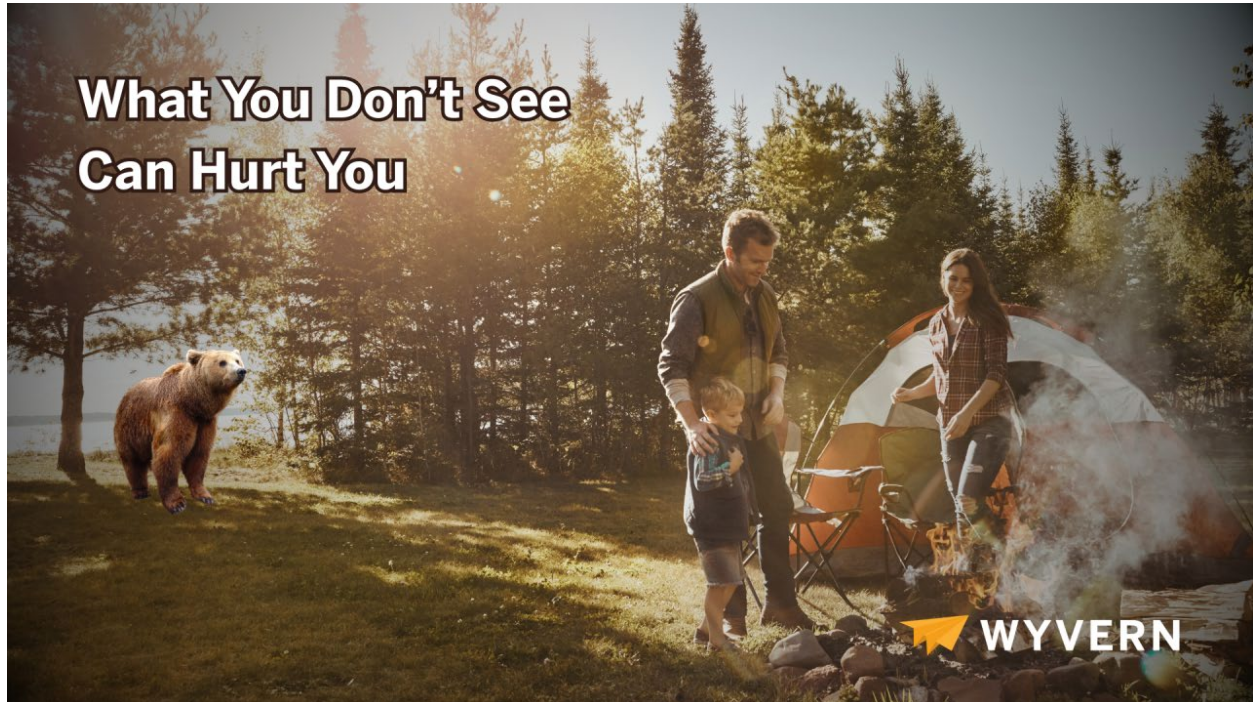


What You Don't See Can Hurt You



The Johari Window and Leadership Awareness

Understanding yourself is the first step to leading others safely

What you don't see can hurt you—like a bear in the woods, an invisible gas leak, or an icy patch beneath a layer of snow. The danger doesn't disappear just because it's out of sight.

That's why great leaders don't just look on the outside—they look inward, too, because situational awareness begins with self-awareness.

In aerospace safety, we often say, "You don't know what you don't know." But what if there were a structured way to uncover those blind spots—within yourself and your team?

Developed by psychologists Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham in 1955, the **Johari Window** is a deceptively simple framework for understanding how self-awareness and interpersonal communication shape team dynamics. For leaders, it becomes a powerful tool—not just for individual growth but for cultivating a safety culture grounded in trust, openness, and accountability.

The Johari Window at a Glance

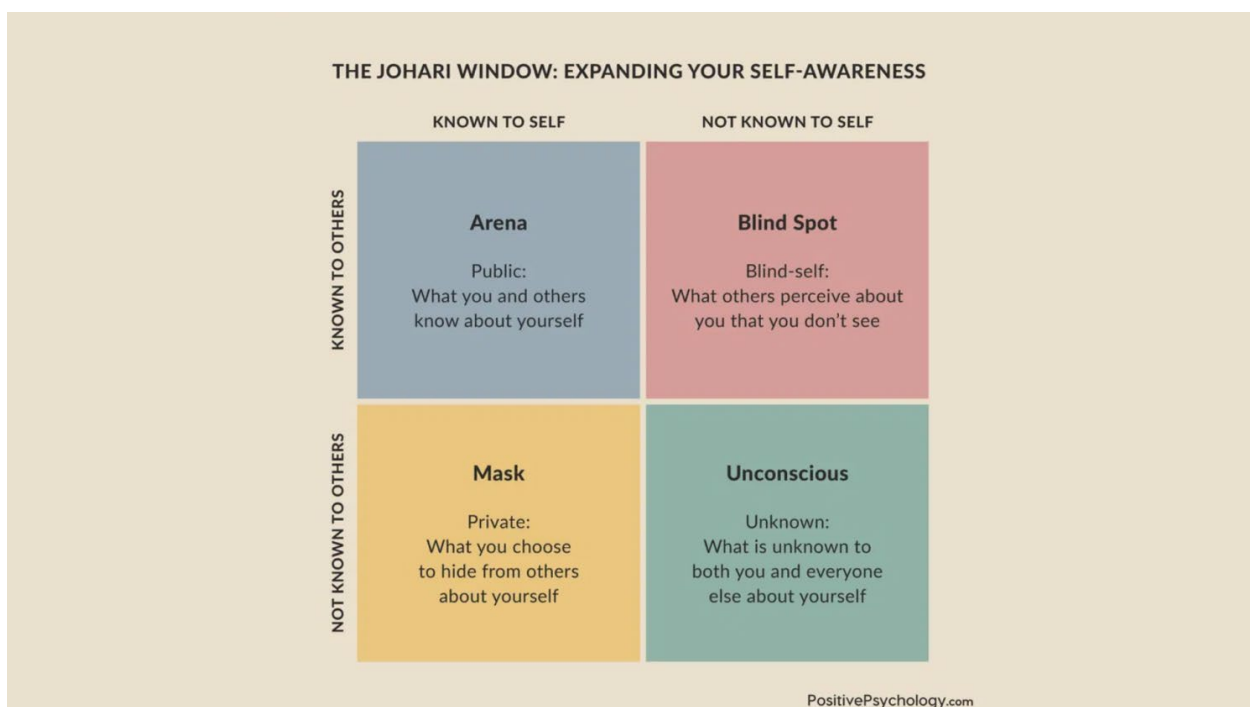
Quadrant Description

Arena Known to both self and others – where effective teamwork, mutual trust, and honest communication thrive.

Blind Spot Known to others but not to self – behaviors, strengths, or risks others see but we may not recognize.

Mask Known to self but not to others – things we choose not to share, either from habit or self-protection.

Unconscious Unknown to both self and others – untapped potential, repressed emotions, or risks yet to emerge.



Each quadrant shifts in size depending on how much we share, how open others are with us, and how well we seek to understand ourselves.

Why the Johari Window Matters in Aerospace

The aerospace environment depends on clear communication, high trust, and shared mental models—all of which thrive in the “Arena.” When team members have large blind spots, hidden concerns, or operate in silos, the risk of human error increases.

In fact, many major accidents—from **Tenerife (1977)** to **Columbia (2003)**—involved hidden assumptions, unspoken concerns, or leadership blind spots that were only recognized in hindsight.

Tenerife (1977): The deadliest aviation accident in history, caused by miscommunication, authority gradient, and limited visibility—leading one aircraft to take off while another remained on the runway.

Columbia (STS-107, 2003): A NASA shuttle disintegrated on re-entry after foam strike damage was minimized by leadership despite engineers' concerns. Investigators cited groupthink and safety culture breakdown.

Blind spots aren't just personal—they're cultural. Great leaders uncover both to build safer teams.

An Operator's Blind Spot: Real-World Example

A charter operation noticed a sharp drop in voluntary safety reports over several months despite a recent push to encourage participation. During a WYVERN Flight Leader coaching session, it became clear that while the director of operations believed the team felt empowered to report issues, many crew members were unsure how the reports were handled—or whether speaking up might lead to repercussions.

The leadership team had unintentionally created a blind spot: they assumed silence meant satisfaction, not hesitation. Once this gap surfaced, they introduced confidential reporting options, held listening sessions, and clarified how reports were used to improve—not punish—outcomes.

Blind Spot reduced. Arena expanded. Risk reduced.

Practical Tips for Safety Leaders

- **Invite Feedback Actively** Ask your team: “Is there something I do—or don’t do—that makes communication harder?”
- **Model Self-Awareness** Share one behavior you’re working on. This vulnerability creates space for others to reflect as well.
- **Watch for Clues to the Hidden** If a team member suddenly withdraws, stops speaking up, or defaults to “it’s fine,” there may be something in the Mask or Unconscious area.

- **Use WYVERN's Coaching, Training, and SMS Tools** Our systems are designed to capture what individuals may not articulate—turning blind spots into learning opportunities and moving from reaction to prevention.
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Reflection Questions for Leaders

1. What do others know about me that I may not fully see?
 2. What am I choosing not to share—and why?
 3. How often do I invite honest input from others?
 4. What patterns or behaviors have gone unaddressed in our team?
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Coming Next:

In Part 2, we'll explore how teams can apply the Johari Window to strengthen safety culture, uncover hidden talent, and turn communication gaps into connection points.

If you are not subscribed to our weekly newsletters, subscribe now at the bottom of this page. For further resources and guidance on implementing Safety Management Systems, contact WYVERN, THE industry expert. Attend our [SMS Training Workshops](#) or ask about our SMS software. [Contact us for a FREE SMS demo!](#) Together, we can elevate aerospace safety and create a safer future.

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