

It Starts With You: The Role of Self-Awareness in Aerospace Safety



Building Awareness for Safer Skies

Last October, we shared an overview of the four key components of Emotional Intelligence (EQ):

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management
- Social Awareness
- Relationship Management

In this new four-part series, we're taking a closer look at each one, starting with the foundation: **Self-Awareness**.

Why Self-Awareness Matters in Aerospace

Whether you're in the flight deck, on the ramp, behind a desk, or overseeing operations, aerospace is full of moments that require clear thinking under pressure. That's where Emotional Intelligence comes into play—and it starts with knowing what's going on inside yourself.

Self-Awareness means recognizing how you're feeling and understanding how those emotions might be shaping your actions or decisions. In safety-critical environments, this awareness can be the difference between reacting impulsively and responding thoughtfully.

But here's the tricky part: many emotions influence us without us even realizing it. Neuroscience tells us that feelings often bubble beneath the surface, affecting how we speak, what we notice, and how we interpret situations. Think about a time when someone rubbed you the wrong way early in the day. Hours later, you're still on edge, reading too much into a coworker's tone or snapping at someone for no real reason. You might not even realize your mood carried over until someone points it out.

That shift—when you recognize what you're feeling—is a moment of power. It's the point when your brain's frontal cortex gets involved and gives you the chance to reassess. Perhaps the frustration wasn't about the person in front of you, but about something that had happened earlier. Now that you're aware of it, you can change your tone, adjust your mindset, and move forward more effectively.

That's emotional Self-Awareness. And it's a core skill for aerospace professionals at every level.

How It Shows Up on the Job

Picture a pilot who's just been rerouted mid-flight. Or a maintenance lead who discovers a last-minute discrepancy. Or a dispatcher dealing with a string of delays. These are situations where frustration, stress, or even overconfidence can creep in and cloud judgment.

Without Self-Awareness, these emotions can hijack communication, create friction within the team, or lead to shortcuts. But when you're tuned in to what you're feeling, you're better equipped to hit pause, reset, and make a more intentional choice—whether that's your tone, your next step, or how you interact with others.

What It Sounds Like in Practice

Emotionally self-aware people don't pretend not to have emotions—they just notice them early and adjust accordingly. You might hear someone say:

- *"I'm more stressed than I realized—let me take a second before we continue."*

- *"I don't think I'm hearing you clearly because I'm still stuck on the earlier conversation."*
- *"I need to check my tone—I don't want to come off as frustrated when I'm just rushed."*

These small acknowledgments create space for better communication and safer decisions. And in aerospace, that space matters.

How to Build More Self-Awareness

Self-Awareness isn't something you either have or don't—it's something you can strengthen over time. Here are a few ways to work on it:

- **Do regular check-ins:** Ask yourself how you're feeling before a meeting, flight, or handoff.
 - **Pay attention to physical signs:** Emotions often show up in the body—tight shoulders, shallow breathing, or clenched fists can be cues.
 - **Debrief honestly:** After an intense moment, ask yourself not just what went wrong or right, but how you felt—and how that affected what you did.
 - **Ask for feedback:** A trusted colleague can often spot something you miss.
 - **Jot it down:** Even a quick note at the end of the day can help track emotional patterns over time.
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Why It Matters for Safety

Self-Awareness is the first building block of Emotional Intelligence. It allows us to notice when emotions are steering the ship—and take back the wheel. In a field like aerospace, where human performance and communication are directly tied to safety, this awareness is more than helpful. It's essential.

Next Up: Self-Management

In Part 2, we'll explore what comes after awareness: managing your emotional responses, especially when the pressure's on. We'll share practical ways aerospace professionals can stay calm, focused, and adaptable—even when things don't go as planned.

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References

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Goleman, D. (2002). *The Emotional Intelligence of Leaders*. Harvard Business Review.