



Navigating Toxic Work and School Environments

The Johari Window Exercise

1

To thrive in your work or school environment, working effectively and reaching your goals is only part of the big picture. Another essential element is your relationships with your coworkers, colleagues, bosses, and others you work with.

This exercise, called the [Johari Window](#), will help you understand how to grow positive, healthy relationships with those you work. Establishing great relationships with coworkers is incredibly important since it can help mitigate harassment, identify allies who will support you during difficult situations, and enable you to thrive in your work environment.

Before beginning this exercise, think about your favorite and least favorite people you have worked with. What qualities did your favorites have? What qualities did those you did not enjoy working with have? Do you think these people were aware of these qualities that you notice about them?

If you read any book about relationships such as Brené Brown's [The Gifts of Imperfection](#), there is always an emphasis that in order to have meaningful and authentic relationships, you must be vulnerable. In her works, Brown emphasizes that vulnerability is strength and courage, not weakness as we may assume. The best leaders are vulnerable, and view vulnerability as courage. This, perhaps, is one of the qualities you admire in the leaders you respect.



Navigating Toxic Work and School Environments

The Johari Window Exercise

Instructions:

The Johari Window is a technique that helps people understand themselves and others. For this exercise, you will need the help of a friend to complete this with you for the most meaningful experience.

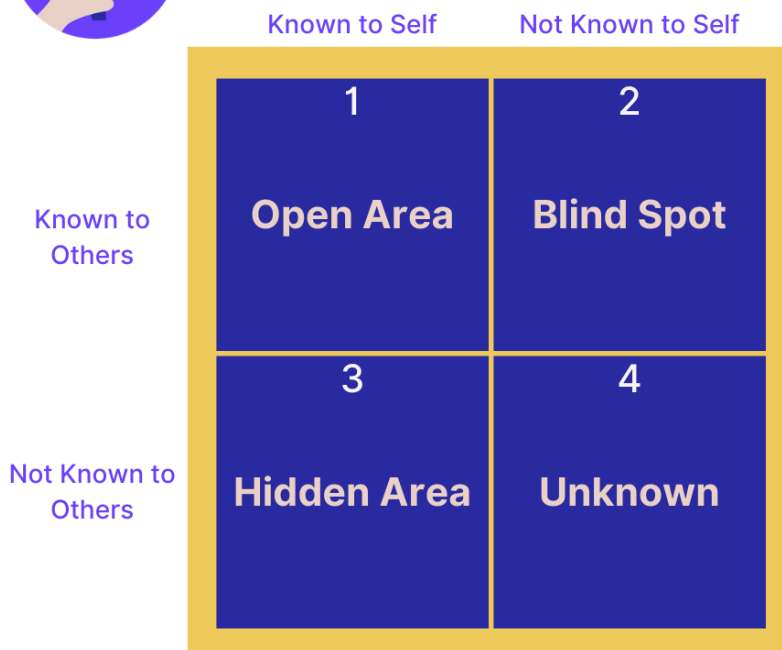
The grid below, or Johari Window, has two columns and two rows, 4 total squares:

1. The top left square (1) is information about you that is known to you and known to others. This could be your hair color, job title, or that you have a specific hobby.
2. The lower left square (3) is information about you that is known to you but unknown to others. This could be an embarrassing moment or what you dreamed last night.
3. The top right square (2) is information that you do not know about yourself but others know about you. This could include some quirks or mannerisms you are unaware about.
4. The bottom right square (4) is information that you do not know about yourself, and other people do not know about you either. This is the complete unknown!

With each personal and professional relationship, the contents of square 1 and 3 change. Different people know different things about you.



The Johari Window





Navigating Toxic Work and School Environments

The Johari Window Exercise

Step 1:

- Get a friend or colleague, 3 pieces of paper, and 2 pens or pencils to write with. Each of you gets one piece of paper and one writing utensil to begin with.
- On the first piece of paper list adjectives (see list below for ideas) that describe your own personality.
- At the same time, have your friend also list adjectives on their first piece of paper (see the list for ideas), choosing the ones they feel describe you.

Step 2:

- On a 3rd paper, draw the Johari Window with the squares empty (or print and use the final page of this exercise). Label each square like the picture above with Known to Self, Not Known to Self, Known to Others, and Not Known to others.
- Fill in adjectives that you and your friend listed into the 4 squares as appropriate (For example, if you both picked the same adjective to describe you, it should go in Square 1.)
- All adjectives should be listed in the Johari Window with Square 4 (the unknowns) blank.
- Optional: Feel free to repeat the exercise, but this time about your friend.

Step 3:

- **Reflection:**
 - How well does your friend know you?
 - Did you learn something about yourself that you didn't know before? Now, that adjective can go into Square 1 since it is known to you!
 - What did your friend learn about you through this exercise?
 - Ask your friend, now that they know more about you, how does that make them feel toward you? Do they respect you more, admire you more, or feel surprised?
 - When you consider your workplace or university relationships, how vulnerable are you with those you work with?
 - What is preventing you from sharing your authentic self with your coworkers and/or colleagues?
 - What could happen if you share more information about yourself with your coworkers and/or colleagues?
 - Note that while this exercise uses adjectives, other content can be used to fill the boxes. This can be your hobbies, interests, likes and dislikes, information about your friends and family, and more. Simply, anything about you can go in these boxes.



Navigating Toxic Work and School Environments

The Johari Window Exercise

The secret to growing relationships personally and professionally is to increase the amount of information in Square 1: Open Area.

How do you increase the amount of information in Square 1: Open Area?

1. In order to move information from “Blind Spot” to “Open Area” you must ask for feedback AND listen to that feedback AND act on that feedback.
2. In order to move information from “Hidden Area” to “Open Area” you must share information with others and be vulnerable.

It can be scary to share information and be authentic with others. That’s exactly why **vulnerability = courage**. It can be especially difficult to be vulnerable and share information about yourself, especially if you have experienced harassment, discrimination, or any kind of betraying or dismissing from others in the past. While there is always risk that the person you share with will not have your best interests in mind, the positive outcomes of sharing greatly outweigh the negative.

Advantages of sharing includes the following:

1. You are living more authentically.
2. Opening up to others can encourage them opening up to you, so you can learn from them.
3. Sharing can open communication channels.
4. Sharing can grow your sense of belonging.
5. Sharing can help you feel safe.
6. Sharing increases feedback you receive.
7. Sharing helps you build trust and respect.
8. Sharing helps you delegate tasks.
9. Sharing can encourage people to give you benefit of the doubt.
10. Sharing can encourage people to share good things about you by word of mouth, and advocate and sponsor you when you are not in the room.
11. If the person you share with is unsupportive, manipulative, abusive, or harassing, you now know who you should set boundaries with and/or not associate with.
12. And more!

Ideas for developing professional relationships:

1. **Connect by making purposeful errors:**
 - a. **Action:** Make an error on purpose, and then, when the person corrects you, thank them.
 - b. **When to use this:** This works best when you are overseeing this person such as in a manager or team lead role.
 - c. **Benefits:** By seeing if the person will correct you, you are testing whether the communication channels between the person and you are open. It also gives you an opportunity to reward, appreciate and connect with this person.



Navigating Toxic Work and School Environments

The Johari Window Exercise

- d. **Possible Negative Outcomes:** If you use this technique on someone who does not respect you, this could backfire and they could view you in a more negative light as someone who is negligent or careless.
2. **Include team members in the decision-making process:**
 - a. **Action:** If deciding on a new mission statement, or even naming a project, include others in the decision-making process. Genuinely thank everyone who informs a decision.
 - b. **When to use this:** Do this when you are leading a team, or starting a new project and would like to gather support from others in your organization.
 - c. **Benefits:** By allowing others to make decisions, you are sharing ownership in the project which will make people more willing to input and work with you on the project. It also gives you an opportunity to show appreciation, which can create connection and openness in your team.
 - d. **Possible Negative Outcomes:** Make sure that you are not relying too much on others to make all of the decisions. As a leader, it is up to you to make the final decision. Relying too much on others can relieve you of too much responsibility, which would limit your leadership moving forward.
3. **Learn what makes your coworkers and colleagues light up, and use it!**
 - a. **Action:** By sharing information about yourself, learn information about others. Listen and watch for what makes them excited or joyous. If the person has children, it's a safe bet that talking about their children will bring them joy. Also, common sources of joy around the world are play and food, so ask about their hobbies or their favorite dish as a starting point!
 - b. **When to use this:** This is best when you are the "new person" in a work or school environment. If you have been working with someone for years and randomly ask about their kids out of the blue, for example, it may seem ill-intentioned or awkward. It is common to get to know new coworkers and colleagues when you are new, or when they are new.
 - c. **Benefits:** By learning what lights up your coworkers and colleagues, you can discuss these topics with them, which will increase your likeability and your connection with them. It can also be used to motivate or inspire them.
 - d. **Possible Negative Outcomes:**
 - i. Be respectful and mindful in the case that they are not as willing to discuss their personal life. If you seem too nosy, that can decrease any kind of openness you are trying to create.
 - ii. Gossip is never in style; what people share with you is between you and them.
 - iii. Oversharing on your behalf can also turn people away from you. Make sure that you ease into developing relationships; it takes time, energy, and love to nourish them.



Navigating Toxic Work and School Environments

The Johari Window Exercise

One last important note about professional relationships:

Throughout my career, I have worked with many different personalities, some easier to work with than others, and some more supportive of me than others. While I appreciate and am grateful to have met them all, some have not treated me well (hence my knowledge and experience in navigating harassment!). When someone harassed me, I used to try to increase likeability using many of the above techniques and tricks. I would be more vulnerable, thank them and show appreciation, and even spend time in social settings outside of work with them hoping that once they liked me more or got to know me better they would stop harassing or belittling me.

Over time I learned this painful truth: some people will never treat me with respect. No matter how much energy and time I invest into trying to “change their mind” about me, or trying to “teach them how to talk to me”, some people will never change their behavior. I had to learn to let go of needing to be liked by everyone, and instead learn to either set boundaries with these people.

At first, I felt at risk because I felt that I was using important networking connections that could help my career in the future. The truth is that nobody has complete control over the entirety of your career. People can put up substantial roadblocks that cause detours, but, in most cases, there are so many OTHER people in the world who actually are willing to support you and your goals.

When I cut connections and set boundaries with unsupportive and toxic people, I did not just lose those relationships, but **I opened up space for new, positive relationships to form.**

When you live your life authentically and being vulnerable, you become better at identifying those who are unsupportive of you, and those who are supportive. You save time and energy that you can then allocate toward reaching your goals and thriving in your career when you are authentic and vulnerable. You can focus on developing the positive relationships that do matter.



Navigating Toxic Work and School Environments

The Johari Window Exercise

List of Adjectives:

- able
- accepting
- adaptable
- bold
- brave
- calm
- caring
- cheerful
- clever
- complex
- confident
- dependable
- dignified
- empathetic
- energetic
- extroverted
- friendly
- giving
- happy
- helpful
- idealistic
- independent
- ingenious
- intelligent
- introverted
- kind
- knowledgeable
- logical
- loving
- mature
- modest
- nervous
- observant
- organized
- patient
- powerful
- proud
- quiet
- reflective
- relaxed
- religious
- responsive
- searching
- self-assertive
- self-conscious
- sensible
- sentimental
- shy
- silly
- spontaneous
- sympathetic
- tense
- trustworthy
- warm
- wise
- witty



Navigating Toxic Work and School Environments The Johari Window Exercise



The Johari Window

Known to Self

Not Known to Self

Known to
Others

Not Known to
Others

