

Relationship Skills

Boundaries & Levels

Boundaries

Boundaries help determine what I let others see about myself and protect me from unwanted invasion of my private life. The depth of a relationship is determined by the willingness of the parties to reveal who they are. As we grow up we develop personal barriers for protection which limit what we reveal about ourselves.

Within the Body of Christ we should have close loving relationships that exhibit oneness and unity. At the same time we will not have intimate relationships with everyone. There is a tension between openness and protection that requires discernment to know who we can open up to.

Let me introduce what is known as *The Johari Window* that was created by Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham in 1955 to help people better understand their interpersonal communication and relationships.

Our relationships are affected by our perceptions of others and ourselves and we act according to those perceptions. The Johari Window is simply a tool to help us analyze these perceptions. It is a model through which people give and receive information. Based on this model we classify information relating to ourselves in four ways:

1. Information that I know about myself
2. Information that I don't know about myself
3. Information that you know about me ("you" can be plural or singular)
4. Information that you don't know about me

Information can consist of facts, perceptions, feelings, prejudices or whatever may be involved in the relationship. Depicted graphically this information is broken down into four areas: the arena, blind spot, façade, and unknown.

The **arena** is the feature of this relationship that is characterized by candor, openness and shared information. A large arena is necessary for any significant relationship.

The **façade** is the protective disguise I erect because of distrust and fear. I am willing to ask questions of you but I will limit what I will tell you. I want to know where you stand before I am willing to commit myself. I can reduce my façade by giving feedback to you and thus exposing my feelings, opinions, perceptions, etc.

	Known to Self	Unknown to Self
Known To Others	ARENA	BLIND SPOT
Unknown To Others	FACADE	UNKNOWN

My **blind spot** is characterized by what I don't know about myself that is plain to others. It prevents me from clearly understanding what others might be trying to tell me. In fact, my blind spot will often cause me to ignore what others are trying to tell me and I may be accused of being insensitive. In order to reduce the size of my blind spot I must be willing to listen to what others have to say. I must seek their feedback in order to better understand.

There is also an **unknown** area that contains information about me that neither you nor I know about. Only God has access to this area and he is willing and able to give me feedback.

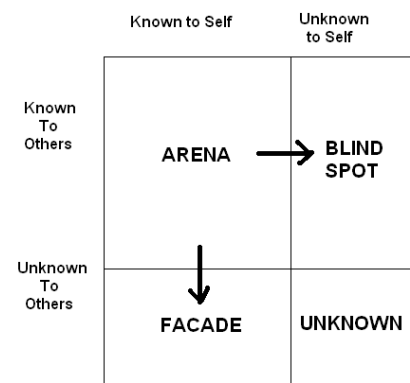
Levels of Intimacy

Our boundaries are different for the different relationships that we have. Below are levels of emotional intimacy that a person experiences as they develop a relationship.

1. **Safe Communication.** At this level we exchange facts and information. There are no feelings, opinions, or personal information exchanged. This level is for people we don't know well and therefore don't know the risks of opening up to them.
2. **Opinions and Beliefs of Others.** At this level we're willing to share the thoughts, beliefs, and opinions of others without revealing our own. We're able to test reactions and can distance ourselves if we feel threatened by criticism or rejection.
3. **Personal Opinions and Beliefs.** At this level we begin to share our own thoughts, opinions, and beliefs. We deal with risk by being open to discussion and persuasion and can change our mind if we feel it's appropriate.
4. **Personal Feelings and Experiences.** Opening up about personal feelings and experiences is a level of vulnerability and intimacy that is limited to those we are sure we can trust. We are willing to tell of our failures, dreams, likes and dislikes, which reveal who we are. This is a level at which we can be completely honest about ourselves without fear and ridicule.

Building Relationships

In building relationships the object is to increase the size of the arena by reducing our façade and blind spot through the interaction of giving and receiving information. Graphically this would look like the chart. It's understood that increasing the arena brings the risk of betrayal so increasing the level of intimacy should be pursued with caution since not all relationships should progress in intimacy.



1. Reducing the Blind Spot

Our blind spot can be reduced by listening to the feedback of others. Others can often see things about us that we can't see in ourselves. Criticism can sometimes hurt but we must learn to glean what we can from the feedback of others, particularly from the people we love and trust. It can even be helpful to ask those we trust what they observe about us that needs to be dealt with.

- Read Proverbs 1:5. Why should you acquire wise counsel?
- Read Proverbs 12:15. How can you improve your openness to the advice of others?
- Read Eph 4:15. Why should we tell others about their issues?

2. Reducing the Façade

The façade is reduced as we open up and reveal who we are to those we are willing to trust. There is always risk but strong relationships are worth the risk. Actually, we never fully reveal everything since there are thoughts, emotions and feelings that we keep to ourselves and don't reveal even to those closest to us. Yet, with God we're an open book so we should never try hide anything from Him since He already knows everything.

- Read James 5:16. Why should you confess your sins to one another?
Why is it difficult?

3. Reducing the Unknown

There are things about ourselves that we are completely unaware. Things of the heart and mind that even those close to us are unaware. Only God knows these areas that are hidden away. We should actively seek God's help in uncovering what needs to be dealt with or changed.

- Read Jer 17:9. Why is the heart deceitful and what are the consequences?
- Read Ps 139:23-24. Pray this prayer over the next week and make a list of the things God reveals to you about yourself.
- Does your behavior encourage a growing relationship with God? What steps will you take to improve your patterns of behavior?

APPENDIX

Read Proverbs 1:5. Why should you acquire wise counsel?

Wise counsel will increase our knowledge and help us to understand what we do not know. Therefore it must be sought. We need to have people around us who will be honest with us and tell it like it is.

Read Proverbs 12:15. How can you improve your openness to the advice of others?

It's foolish to think that you have all the answers and don't need the input of others. Such foolishness is based in pride. We need to humble ourselves and seek advice from those we trust. Seek input by asking questions and listening without being defensive.

Read Eph 4:15. Why should we tell others about their issues?

Providing feedback to those we care about enables them to go spiritually. As this verse explains we should do so in a loving way that improves the relationship so that you grow together.

Read James 5:16. Why should you confess your sins to one another? Why is it difficult?

Spiritual healing can be found if we open up and confess our sins to someone we trust. We're all flawed so it shouldn't be a surprise to anyone that we've fallen short. Praying for one another can be huge in dealing with our sin and restoring our relationship with the Father.

Read Jer 17:9. Why is the heart deceitful and what are the consequences?

The heart is deceitful because of our sin nature so that we are often unaware of our sick condition. The Holy Spirit is on a campaign to cleanse our heart bringing to the surface what must be dealt with. Our cooperation with Him is essential to make the process less painful.

Does your behavior encourage a growing *arena* in your relationships? What steps will you take to improve your patterns of behavior? How can you help others to improve theirs?