

# Leader as an Observer

## Leader as an Observer

### Awareness of being as the source of action and results

At first glance, leadership appears to be about action. Making decisions, setting direction, motivating others, steering complex systems. But underneath every action lies something deeper — a way of observing. And it is this observer that silently, continuously shapes the results we create.

#### 1. Leadership as a function of observation

Take a leader preparing for a critical meeting with the board. One version of her might enter with tension, interpreting questions as challenges to her competence. She speaks defensively, rushes to justify decisions, and exits the room frustrated and unheard.

Another version of the same leader walks into the same meeting, sensing the board's concern as genuine interest. She listens with curiosity, pauses before responding, and frames her answers in shared purpose. The meeting flows. The conversation is generative. The tone shifts.

The facts haven't changed. The people are the same. But the outcomes are radically different.

What changed is the observer — the way the leader related to herself, others, and the situation. This is not just a matter of attitude. It is the foundation from which action arises.

In another example, a senior executive struggles with a misaligned team. His habitual reaction is to assert control — more meetings, clearer instructions, closer supervision. But nothing really improves. Only when he pauses to notice how his view of others — as unmotivated or resistant — influences his every move, does something shift. With this

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awareness, he begins to see possibility where he once saw limits. His stance softens. The team opens up.

### 2. The observer as language, emotion, and body

In ontological coaching, the observer is understood as a dynamic integration of three dimensions: language, emotion, and body.

- Language shapes what we see as possible. A leader who says “there’s no time” creates a world of urgency and reactivity, closing doors to reflection and creativity.
- Emotion colors our perceptions. Leading from fear or anger generates different actions than leading from compassion or enthusiasm.
- Body is often overlooked but vital. Our posture, breath, and physical presence affect our capacity to listen, respond, and hold space.

Together, these domains form a “way of being” — a lens through which the leader relates to the world. And as long as that lens remains unconscious, it becomes the unseen filter behind every decision, every conversation, and every strategy.

To observe the observer is to begin the journey of leadership transformation.

### 3. Why developing the observer matters

Without awareness of the observer, change efforts risk being cosmetic. Leaders adopt new techniques or frameworks, but old patterns persist. The same conflicts emerge. The same blind spots appear. It’s like changing the sails without noticing the direction of the wind.

By contrast, when a leader starts to inquire into how they observe — what assumptions they carry, what emotions they inhabit, what narratives shape their sense of reality — something more powerful happens. They no longer react automatically. They begin to

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choose. And from that place, new actions — and new results — become possible.

This doesn't mean discarding what is. It means seeing more fully. Seeing with less distortion. Seeing what is actually there — within and around.

A CEO once reflected, “For years I thought I was making rational decisions. But they were all filtered through my fear of irrelevance. When I noticed that, I could finally lead for the sake of something bigger than myself.”

### 4. From techniques to transformation

Many leadership programs focus on what to do: tools, best practices, behaviors. These have value — but their impact is limited if they do not address the deeper source: who the leader is being.

True leadership development involves a shift not just in action, but in perception.

The question is not just what to do, but from where are we acting?

This is the quiet revolution of leadership: not about acquiring more knowledge, but about shifting the way we relate to ourselves and the world. It is a developmental path — from reactivity to presence, from assumption to curiosity, from separation to connection.

And that shift begins by becoming aware of the observer.

### 5. An invitation to inquiry

You don't need to change everything overnight. Instead, begin with honest, gentle observation:

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- How do I tend to see others in moments of pressure?
- What emotions shape my leadership in quiet and in conflict?
- What bodily habits do I carry into meetings, decisions, and conversations?
- Where am I observing from — and how does that shape what I see?

This is not about fixing. It's about becoming more whole. More aware. More capable of choosing how to respond — rather than repeating old patterns.

### 6. Where the path leads next

Awareness of the observer is a significant turning point in leadership. But there is more.

Even when we become aware, we notice that our observer is never static. It is always in a state. Some states narrow our perception and keep us locked in reactive cycles. Others open up spaciousness, creativity, and connection.

That is where the next step in development begins.