

Mirror, Mirror!

How the people in our world reveal ourselves to us

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We all have aspects of ourselves that are hidden to us, weaknesses, unresolved issues, and challenges buried deep. The people we meet as we move through life, hold up mirrors that reflect back to us who we are. When we understand how to truly see what others reveal to us, we can learn, flourish, be authentic and grow.

We are literally born alone, taking our first breath into the world on our own, and we take our last breath out and die alone. But we can all acknowledge that once we are here, we are born into families of various shapes and sizes. After a few years, we begin to head out into the world. As our lives move outward and expand beyond our family units, we then bring people into the journey of our lives to further expand our circle to include... friends, extended family, neighbors, schoolmates, teachers, the people in our communities, our workplaces, mentors, and society at large.

Each and every person around us create a role that we play out. As the roles we take on shift and change, our lives expand and contract along the way. Likewise, the people, circumstances, and environments that surround us evolve and grow too. We may, along the way, set boundaries and deliberately separate ourselves from people who impact us negatively, and for one reason or another, they no longer serve our highest and best. Along the way, everyone and everything we encounter acts as mirrors, revealing to us aspects of ourselves. When we know how to look and interpret lessons from roles, we can find valuable opportunities to learn, evolve and grow.

Reflecting and revealing

Others do not define who you are, but they do act as mirrors to reveal aspects of yourself to you. Through the mirrors they hold up to you, there is much you can learn.

You learn from each and every person outside of you. Others show you who you are

in the roles you play. In front of your sibling, you see yourself as a sibling, in the presence of our parents we see ourselves as children, in front of a teacher, we see ourselves as a student, a friend in front of a friend, as a professional in amongst your co-workers. We learn from everyone, from our classmates and our coworkers, to our parents and our children, and society. Also, beyond people, the world mirrors aspects of you to you too. For example, in front of a textbook, you see yourself and how you are as a student, in winter, you see if you like or dislike winter, and in summer, you see how you respond in that role you play out in that season. Everything outside of you, reflects back your likes and dislikes, strengths, obstacles, and challenges.

The value of paying attention

As those around you reflect and reveal who you are to you, it's your job to pay attention to what comes up. What uplifts and inspires you? What makes you feel less confident and self-assured? And what brings forth triggers, anger, and resentment? Notice what brings up acceptance and ease, versus feelings of reactivity and defensiveness?

Sometimes we like what we see. But, particularly with difficult people and situations, we are confronted by uncomfortable feelings, like anger, mistrust, and other difficult emotions. When we pay attention to what we receive back from others — particularly those situations with which we struggle, we will see that we have much to learn and we can enhance our skillset to cope or facilitate a new way of being.



The big reveal

For example, imagine that in your dealings with a co-worker, you catch them in a little white lie about some trivial matter, and you find yourself then struggling deeply with this person and their lie. The *mirror* of this situation could be a big reveal; it could be showing you a weakness in yourself, of how you avoid expressing yourself, avoid confrontation, suppress true thoughts and feelings, judge without getting confirmation, — if that was a lie, or something else — don't feel confident confronting people with their lies, or it could show you an aspect of your life that you need to work on, like being communicative and expressing yourself with your true feelings, or hurt feelings.

Since it is your job to learn and grow through your interactions with others, rather than become caught up in the story of this person and their lie, you could choose instead to pay attention to your reaction, and what this scenario has revealed to you about yourself. Maybe there is somewhere within you, some struggle with sharing your truth with others, asking for confirmation, or when you hide your authentic self you sometimes do it to spare the feelings of someone else in your life because you don't want to bring them uncomfortable feelings.

Out of the shadow

Pioneering psychologist C. G. Jung defined our shadow as the part of ourselves that is unknown to us. Uncomfortable, triggering people and situations can coax our shadow selves — that is to say, our deep-seated issues that we struggle with and may not be fully aware of — out of our depths.

Here is another example. If someone calls me stupid and I am pretty secure, self-confident and generally in high self-esteem, I know that this is not true, so that remark rolls off me like water off a duck's back. But if someone calls me stupid and I am struggling with the pain of a parent or teacher who called me stupid for years growing up, I might now become triggered, and react in anger or become

defensive. The person saying “stupid” today is simply mirroring to me where I stand, with myself. It makes me look and reflect: *‘Do I feel secure about myself and who I am intellectually? Or am I feeling hurt because I’m still dealing with an inner-child emotion that is unresolved, as a child wondering if I’m intelligent or not, because of some comments I heard from a parent or teacher?’*

To learn and grow

People, events, and situations we struggle with always reflect our weaknesses, concerns to work on, and vulnerabilities. If we are paying attention and open to seeing ourselves clearly, these encounters shine a light on some of the most difficult aspects of ourselves. In these dark corners, we can find possibilities for healing, shifting, and growth. Our defense responses — in the form of feelings of unworthiness, anger, fear, or shame — are red flags, marking ‘problem’ zones, and areas in our lives where we struggle and we need to work through. It helps us see our unresolved feelings, issues, blocks, and challenges.

No matter who we are interacting with, there is always a mirror between us and that person. They have a mirror and we have a mirror. When challenging people, events, and situations hold up mirrors that show us struggles and uncomfortable feelings, they reveal opportunities for us to learn and grow. Rather than hide from our uncomfortable emotions and emotional debris, we can instead have compassion for ourselves and learn what the mirror is really about. We can begin to confront and deal with our vulnerabilities and weaknesses and then make room for our most authentic life and be in our highest and best selves.

Learning about what we are uncomfortable with allows us the opportunity to remove judgment, fears, self-doubt, and reactions that are stemming from low self-confidence, misinterpretation, and emotional issues from the past being carried into the present moment.



Dealing with your shadow and uncomfortable emotions mirrored

Realize that people are mirrors, reflecting aspects of yourself to you... showing you areas of negative judgment, fears, insecurities, poor boundaries, and self-doubt. Let's pause and reflect, versus react.

Pay attention to what comes up when you encounter difficult people and situations that trigger uncomfortable feelings and strong negative reactions.

Decide to focus on addressing your vulnerabilities rather than get caught up in difficult stories that brought about emotional turmoil and those areas being shown to you to work through.

Have compassion for yourself as you learn to grow through your encounters and experiences. We are all perfect and a work in

progress. Each and every role you play in life has an opportunity to teach you something, for you to work on yourself and become a better version of yourself.

Work on yourself to see what intention you act from. Is it from truth and honesty? When you act from good intentions, you may still encounter challenging hurtful emotions. Realize that other people's opinions of you will be tainted more by their ongoing work in progress, and their emotions with their mirrors, than sometimes the truth. There's always their truth, my truth, and the truth. Focus on your truth and your intention, and the storyline that is bringing about reactions. Try to learn from your reactions, to see the mirror that you need to heal on the inside, or alter in behaviors to be a higher, better version on the outside.



Heal your past, deal with your present
and take control of your future.

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About the author

Dr. Monica Vermani is a Clinical Psychologist specializing in treating trauma, stress and mood & anxiety disorders, and the founder of Start Living Corporate Wellness. She is a well-known speaker and author on mental health and wellness. Her upcoming book, A Deeper Wellness, is scheduled for publication in 2021. <https://www.drmonicavermani.com/> Dr. Vermani has recently launched an exciting online self-help program, A Deeper Wellness, delivering powerful mental-health guidance, life skills, and knowledge that employees can access anywhere, anytime. <https://www.adeeperwellness.com/>

