

Defensiveness: The Enemy of Self-Awareness

For many of us, it is easier to spot our defensive behaviors than it is to perceive the feelings leading to those behaviors. Below is a list of 48 behaviors that are common signs of defensiveness. Take a moment and put a check by the top three defense behaviors that you most often do. If you do not think you do any of these behaviors, then just check off box number 12.

1	Loss of humor		25	Holding a grudge	
2	Taking offense		26	Eccentricity	
3	High charge or energy in the body		27	Being too nice	
4	Sudden drop in IQ		28	Selective deafness	
5	Wanting to be right		29	Trivializing with humor	
6	Wanting the last word		30	Inappropriate laughter or giggling	
7	Endless explaining and rationalizing		31	Personalizing everything	
8	Flooding with information to prove a point		32	All-or-nothing thinking	
9	Playing “poor me”		33	Catastrophizing	
10	Teaching or preaching		34	Fast breathing/heartbeat	
11	Rigidity		35	Cold, clammy skin	
12	Denial		36	Hot, sweaty skin	
13	Withdrawal into deadly silence		37	Mind reading	
14	Cynicism (victim)		38	Jumping to conclusions	
15	Sarcasm		39	Making fun of others (being highly critical)	
16	“I’m aware of that; leave me alone” (defense of awareness)		40	Attacking (the best defense is a good offense)	
17	Terminal uniqueness (I’m so special; rules don’t apply to me)		41	Acting crazy (the temporary insanity defense)	
18	“It’s just my personality; it’s just how I am”		42	Magnifying everything	
19	Not wanting to negotiate		43	Minimizing everything	
20	Blaming		44	Emotional rigidity (if I feel it, it’s true)	
21	Sudden onset of illness or accident		45	Speaking too fast	
22	Confusion		46	Becoming physically immobile	
23	Suddenly tired or sleepy		47	Obsessive thinking	
24	Intellectualizing		48	Addictions: alcohol, shopping, work, or other	

Managing Defensiveness

Successfully reducing your defensiveness involves increasing your self-awareness of your own defensive behaviours and then managing those behaviours. Your top three signs of defensiveness are now your personal early warning system that you are becoming fearful or protective of something and are beginning to get defensive. This defensiveness will ultimately hinder your effectiveness in knowing who you are, having clarity, and therefore developing the visionary style. Here are strategies that can help you manage these defensive responses:

- 1. Take Responsibility:** Acknowledge that you are becoming defensive and that you have a responsibility to maintain a collaborative spirit and intention when working with others.
- 2. Slow Down:** Relax, take a deep breath, slow down physically, take a short walk, go to the restroom, splash some water on your face, take a time out, reschedule the rest of the meeting, and so on. Do whatever is necessary to center yourself.
- 3. Confront Your Negative Self-Talk and Assumptions:** Change any negative self-talk into a more supportive frame of mind.
- 4. Go to the Balcony:** This is a negotiation technique that implies psychologically removing yourself from the scene of your physical reality and seeing yourself as if looking down from a balcony over a stage. From this vantage point, you are able to be a momentary observer of what is happening both around you and within you. A few quick questions can help you connect, tune in, and choose appropriate action: What's the situation down there? What am I feeling about that situation? What is important to me? How are my feelings supporting or getting in the way of what I want in this situation?
- 5. Increase Your Appreciation:** While you are on the balcony, try to increase your appreciation of the people you need to work with. What are their strengths? What is important to them? How are they feeling about this situation?
- 6. Start Over and Choose a Non-Defensive Response.**