

# REDUCING WORKPLACE BIAS: THE SPOTLIGHT EFFECT

## SHORT DESCRIPTION

### WHAT:

The Spotlight Effect is the tendency to over rate how much other people are interested in you and what you have to say.

### PROBLEM:

The spotlight effect can lead to unrealistic expectations of other people's natural interest in you. This can lead not only to disappointment but in poorly presenting yourself to others, affecting your communication and relationships.

### SOLUTION:

The lesson and meditation help recalibrate your expectation you have of others interest in you, and provide ways to present yourself more humbly and effectively.



Almost all of us like attention, and seek it in one way or another. We can get disappointed, frustrated and even angry if we don't get the attention we think we deserve.

As mentioned before, recent data shows that the perceived lack of attention often drives the decision to seek employment elsewhere. There are individual differences of course.

Some people are attention sponges, seeking it out wherever they go. Others are more inhibited and some are even content not being the focus of attention.

We can look at this issue from both sides: a person's need for attention, and the need to make someone feel appreciated.

*"It's not all about you!"* A colleague yells after you explain thoughts about how to carry out a new project. You were speaking from your own perspective, of course. However, you must have presented your ideas in a way which were perceived as exclusive of her.

She's very upset. She might have added, *"It's about me, too!"* Unfortunately, for many, it is about us. We earnestly want to share our thoughts, opinions and perspectives. There are ways of doing that, of course. If your comments are filled with condescending judgments about how great you are and how insignificant others are by comparison, then you probably do have a problem -- even if you are great.

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## WAYS TO MANAGE THE SPOTLIGHT EFFECT

1.

**MANAGE YOUR EXPECTATIONS.** While it is reasonable to want to be appreciated, we should also recognize that many of us often exaggerate our importance and thus have a disproportionate view of how much positive attention we “should” get.

We know what we do, how hard we work, etc., etc., because we are with us all the time and see the contribution, in a way that others typically are not.

Our experience of our work contribution is likely to be different from an other person’s view of our contribution. Which, of course, is why, open, authentic, two-way communication is a vital part of any work or team process.

2.

**TREAT OTHERS WITH RESPECT.** On the other side of the coin it is important to respect others and that includes not just giving them attention but giving them “authentic” attention. People have a right to being treated with respect, trust and fairness.

They will respond more to that than anything else including gratuitous flattery. We want to feel that the people around us are fair and authentic. There’s no better way of enhancing a relationship than with authenticity, trust, respect and fairness.

3.

**UNDERSTAND THE NEEDS OF YOUR TEAM.** In a management or leadership role it is important to understand the needs of your team members and adapt accordingly. However, one should assume that most people want authentic feedback, and thus such communication is critical.

Some people might not need so much feedback but almost nobody wants to be ignored. And given that the default setting is for most people to expect more attention than is reasonable, be mindful of the importance of recognition.

4.

**MINDFULNESS AND MEDITATION.** It can make you more aware of your conscious processes, including self-perception and your need for attention. Remember that the most critical thing that people will remember about you, is how you made them feel. You ignore and disrespect people at your own peril.

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*“Humility isn’t thinking less of yourself, it’s thinking of yourself less.”*

– Rick Warren

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The fact is that most humans do want attention. We do want others to like us. We want validation on many aspects of our behavior: our appearance, skills, personality, and so on.

The logical extension of this need for attention is that everyone wants that validation, which means that many people are focused on how others perceive them. They want to be liked, admired, adored, appreciated. It's a natural and understandable mindset.

The problem is that, because most people are also looking for the same things, we can overestimate how much focus and appreciate others will give to us. It's as if you want to be the center of attention, but so does everybody else. We are all the center of our own worlds.

## THIS IS THE SPOTLIGHT EFFECT:

To have unreasonable expectations about how much people will notice, appreciate and focus on you. With this expectation and mindset can come disappointment, even frustration and anger.

People are going to be less interested in you than ideally you would like, unless you are a celebrity. So don't have high expectations. And certainly don't have the spotlight bias, the assumption that people will naturally focus on you.

Ironically, the way to really get people's attention is by relating to them, by paying attention to them rather than expecting them to do the same to you. They will only connect with you and pay your attention that you are looking for, when you have created an emotional connection, by focusing on them.

It can be very difficult to accurately identify our need for attention and how far we go in manifesting it.

Someone might think that they are caring and attentive, when others see them as narcissistic. There can often be a mismatch between your self-perception and how others see you.



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**How do you know how others perceive you?**

**Has anyone ever accused you of being selfish and egotistical?**

If one person has it doesn't necessarily mean that's true, but if several people have, there might well be something to it.

**When interacting with others do you spend more time talking or listening?**

**Are you disappointed if the conversation doesn't revolve around you?**

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## Are you a good listener?

When you have biased expectations about how much attention you're going to receive from others, you'll be disappointed. That attention is not going to happen without some effort on your part. It comes when you have made a sincere and earnest effort to engage with others in a caring way.



*I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.*

– Maya Angelou

Now, there are people, typically celebrities, who do have people fawning all over them. In fact, Cornell Medical School Professor of Psychiatry Dr. Robert Millman coined the term “acquired situational narcissism” to describe very successful people who attract such attention and admiration. It becomes the norm and they not unreasonably expect it, even if they don't always welcome it.



*Whoever loves becomes humble. Those who love have, so to speak, pawned a part of their narcissism.*

– Sigmund Freud

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## MEDITATION

Being compassionate and really caring for others means the willingness to give up your own egotism. True love is putting yourself second and being perfectly OK with that. It means not expecting to be in the spotlight. It means being perfectly OK with not being in the spotlight.

Imagine being in a group where someone is dominating the conversation in an egotistical way. Their talk is all about directing the attention to them. They are an attention vampire, giving no one else a chance to talk.

How would you react to someone like that? How would others react? What would be the consequences of their actions? Now, imagine a conversation with someone who is listening carefully to every word, fully engaged in your words and feelings.

How would you respond to someone like that? How would others respond?  
**Whoever loves becomes humble. Whoever loves becomes humble.**

When you surrender you need to be in the spotlight, you might get the attention you deserve. When you act lovingly towards others, you might get the attention you deserve.

*People will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.  
People will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.*

When you are loving and kind you are humble. When you are loving and kind you are humble. Others respond to humility. They notice humility. They appreciate humility.

**Humility isn't thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less.**  
Humility isn't thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less.

**You don't want the spotlight on you because you demand it, you want the spotlight on you because you deserve it. That's the best type of spotlight; spotlight that you have earned.**

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"Humility isn't thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less."*

You don't want the spotlight on you because you demand it, you want the spotlight on you because you deserve it. How you make people feel will determine the attention you get.

Do you want to be someone who demands attention or earns it? **You can earn attention by being caring and compassionate. You can earn attention by listening carefully and with a complete focus.**

You can earn attention by making others feel comfortable, appreciated, understood and respected. You earn respect by making others feel comfortable, appreciated, understood and respected.