

excerpt from
Leadership and Self-Deception
Getting Out of the Box
by The Arbinger Institute

Preface

For too long, the issue of self-deception has been the realm of deep-thinking philosophers, academics, and scholars working on the central questions of the human sciences. The public remains generally unaware of the issue. That would be fine except that self-deception is so pervasive it touches every aspect of life. “Touches” is perhaps too gentle a word to describe its influence. Self-deception actually determines one’s experience in every aspect of life. The extent to which it does that, and in particular the extent to which it is the central issue in leadership, is the subject of this book.

To give you an idea of what’s at stake, consider the following analogy. An infant is learning to crawl. She begins by pushing herself backward around the house. Backing herself around, she gets lodged beneath the furniture. There she thrashes about—crying and banging her little head against the sides and undersides of the pieces. She is stuck and hates it. So she does the only thing she can think of to get herself out—she pushes even harder, which only worsens her problem. She’s more stuck than ever.

If this infant could talk, she would blame the furniture for her troubles. She, after all, is doing everything she can think of. The problem couldn’t be hers. But of course, the problem is hers, even though she can’t see it. While it’s true she’s doing everything she can think of, the problem is precisely that she can’t see how she’s the problem. Having the problem she has, nothing she can think of will be a solution.

Self-deception is like this. It blinds us to the true cause of problems, and once blind, all the “solutions” we can think of will actually make matters worse. That’s why self-deception is so central to leadership—because leadership is about making matters better. To the extent we are self-deceived, our leadership is undermined at every turn—and not because of the furniture.

We have written this book to educate people about this most central of problems—a problem that has been the exclusive terrain of scholars for far too long. But this book is about more than the problem. There is a solution to self-deception as well.

Our experience in teaching about self-deception and its solution is that people find this knowledge liberating. It sharpens vision, reduces feelings of conflict, enlivens the desire for teamwork, redoubles accountability, magnifies the capacity to achieve results, and deepens satisfaction and happiness. We hope that this introduction to the self-deception problem and solution will give people new leverage in all of these areas. In organizations as varied as commercial ventures, neighborhoods, and families, what is needed most is people not just with influence but with influence for good.

Buy the book or learn more about it

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