

Ignorance is Easier

You can't handle the truth!

That famous line from *A Few Good Men* is memorable and offensive. Of course I can handle the truth! I'm a curious, rational, truth-seeking person.

Until it comes to myself.

It's not that hard to be truth-seeking (or at least truth-open) about other people or the world around me. I can handle difficult realities when they are out of my control. The price tag for my car repairs, the likelihood of a catastrophic asteroid strike, and even bad news about my genetics are truths I'm braced to face.

What I don't want to know are the things I'm doing wrong to cause my own suffering. That's the scary, hard truth.

Being in utter darkness about why I'm not getting what I want is more comfortable than the knowledge that it's because of some attitude or behavior of mine that's out of whack. It's easier to handle being treated badly by someone for no apparent reason than to find it it's because I'm an unpleasant conversationalist.

I'm not alone in aversion to self-knowledge. It seems to be part of the human condition.

It's one of the reasons employers rarely give reasons for not hiring candidates. It's not too hard to handle not getting a job offer without knowing why. It affords the comfort of conjecture. Maybe the company is just stupid. Maybe the boss's nephew had an inside track all along. Those possibilities are livewithable. I'm not going to send an angry email to the company if I don't know why I didn't get hired.

But if I find out I wasn't hired because something I said offended the interviewer, they think I have weak attention to detail, and the way I handled a question about my previous work came across as cavalier, I'm going to think they are wrong. I'm gonna be mad. Employers know that the more detailed rejection feedback they provide me, the more likely I am to send an angry response. More information about how I can improve means more points of disagreement and more fodder for rage.

Truths I can control are also the most important. That's what makes them so scary. I know they can submarine me. And I know it doesn't just take mental toughness and acceptance like truths out of my control. It also takes ownership, action, and discipline.

Ouch.

But there's hope in this too.

If I can learn to seek truths about myself with the same openness as I seek truths about the world outside myself, I will be invincible. If I can handle what I discover and maintain self-honesty about my self-knowledge, there is nothing I can't do. In other words, the greatest single determinant of my quality of life is something within my control.

That's the comforting, terrifying truth.