

Reflections on Growth Mindset & Self-Talk

...with special guests:
Shame and Vulnerability

Susan Gagliano, Professional Advanced Counselor
Teacher Trainer for Erasmus+ @Europass Teacher Academy
Athena European University – BIP Soft Skills
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Recently feeling
amazed
In Amsterdam

My name is Susan Gagliano, I'm originally from the US and I live in Florence, Italy.

I am a professional counselor who works with individuals and groups on their self-awareness, relational abilities and self-realization.

I also work with EU teachers in Erasmus+, supporting their personal and professional growth, motivation and self-care.

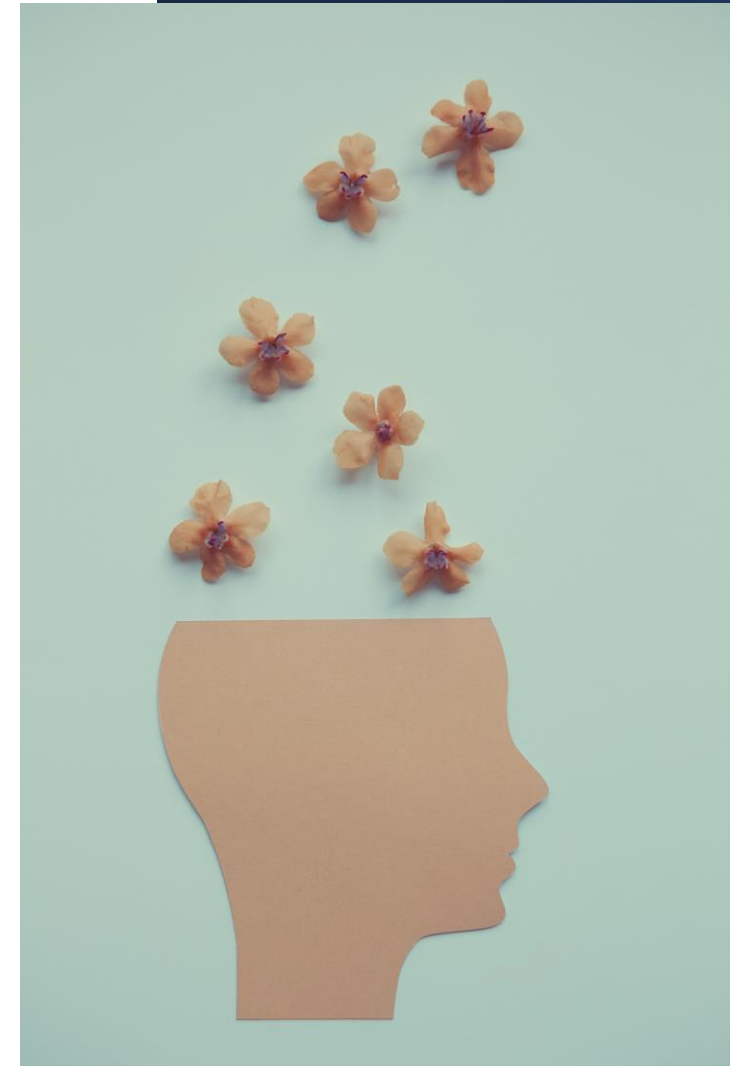


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Mindset

The established set of attitudes held by someone. (Oxford)

Someone's general attitude, and the way in which they think about things and make decisions. (Longman)



The creation of a Mindset

Who: Me

Age: 5

Possibilities: endless

Emotions: all over the place

Thoughts: My brothers said that jellyfish will get me if I swim in this lake.

Result: I stayed right there on that dock and watched them have fun





Learning about myself with others

Age: 6

I – like all of us - was already defining myself based on my family's values, beliefs, social norms and reactions towards me and towards life, as well as those of my teachers and my classmates.

This is part of a natural, healthy development of a personal and social identity.

But sometimes there are forks in the road.

3rd grade

Based on daily interactions with my family, my teachers and my peers, I was drawing some important conclusions about myself:

- I talked too much
- I was bad at sports
- I was not good with numbers
- I was "smart" but didn't "apply" myself
- Sitting next to me meant getting in trouble for talking

(there was also good stuff but I didn't think that was as important)





Staying safe

By 6th grade, I already had my strategies in place in order to feel safe:

- Stick to what you are good at
- Keep seeking positive feedback about it
- Avoid what you are not good at (i.e. like numbers or formulas or foreign languages or anything with a ball)
- Shrug and act like you don't really care when teachers say "If only you applied yourself!"
- Make self-deprecating jokes about your "failures" so no one can criticize you – or *expect* more from you



Unpleasant emotions

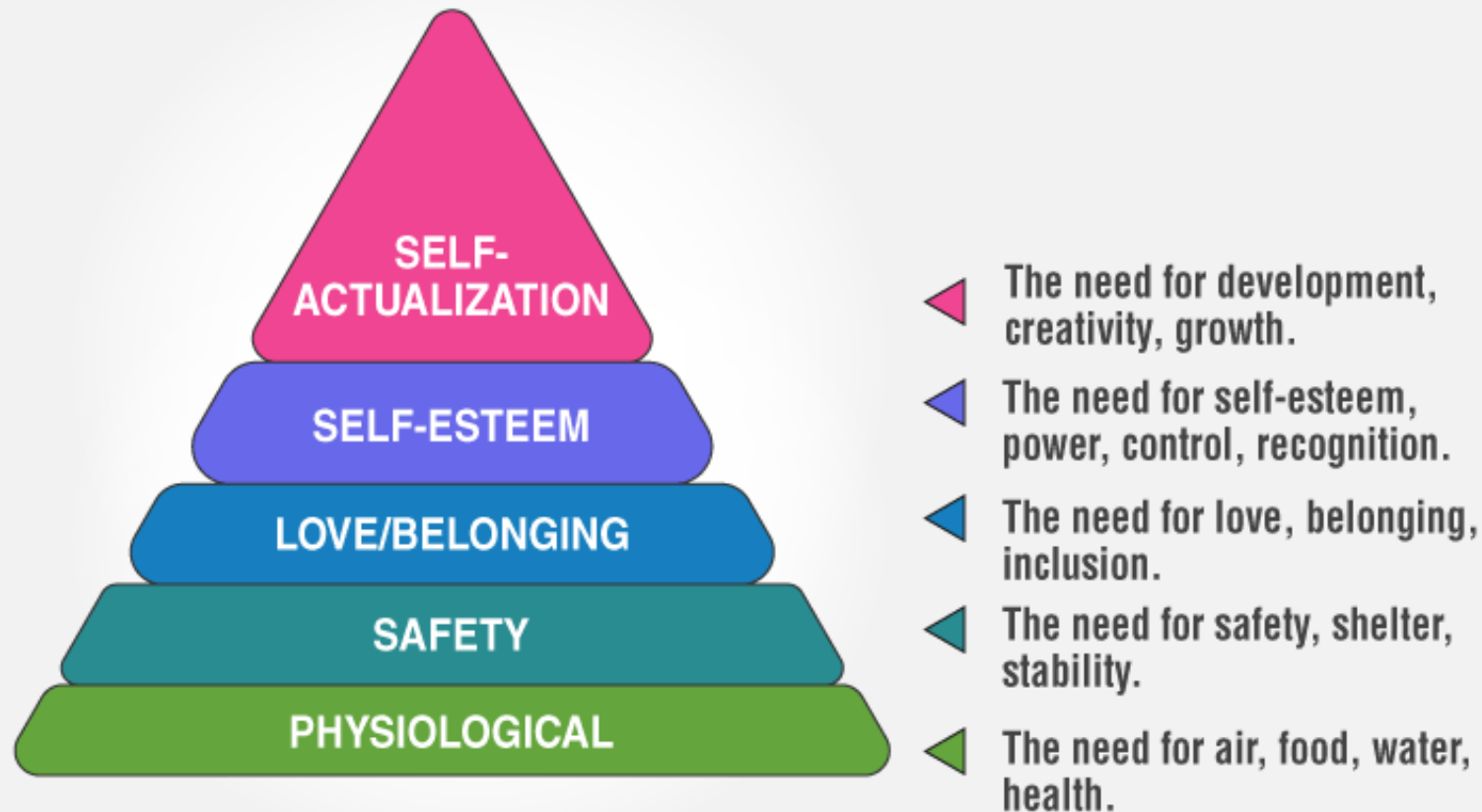
Why did I stay away from these challenges? Was I incapable of learning? Was it true that I simply was "no good at Math" or "hated foreign languages" or "couldn't stand physics" or "not sporty"?

How it got this way doesn't really matter for our purposes.

What matters is the emotion that connected all of them that I was running from:

SHAME

MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS



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What needs are we trying to satisfy?

Depending on the circumstances, we may find ourselves on different levels of the hierarchy

Carol Dweck

Dr. Carol S. Dweck is a renowned psychologist and professor at Stanford University.

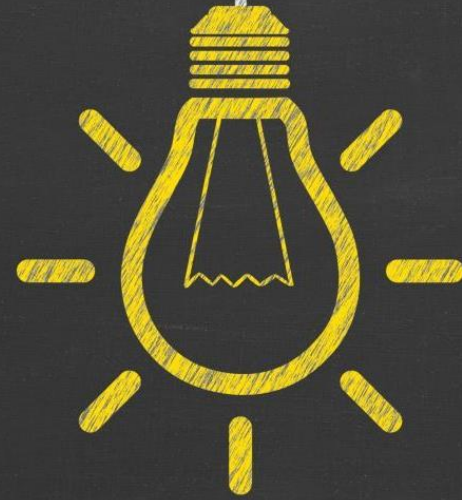
Her research on motivation, achievement, and the concept of mindset has uncovered how our beliefs about intelligence and abilities impact our success and resilience.



Growth Mindset

Dweck's research states that with a growth mindset, we can approach challenges and failures as opportunities to learn and grow, rather than as evidence of our limitations.

We can be more resilient in the face of obstacles and setbacks, and we can continue to improve and develop our skills and abilities throughout our lives.



Fixed Mindset



A belief system in which individuals believe that their abilities, intelligence, and talents are fixed traits that cannot be significantly developed or improved.



People with a fixed mindset tend to believe that their qualities are inherent and unchangeable, leading them to perceive success or failure as a result of these fixed attributes, rather than their efforts or learning.

"Let's not go there"

In a fixed mindset, setbacks may be seen as personal failures. Feedback and criticism may be taken personally and seen as a threat to self-image, leading to defensiveness or resistance.





Fixed Mindset Behaviors

Avoiding challenges –
Constantly seeking validation
– Believing in "natural talent"
- Fear of failure – Ignoring
feedback –

Constantly comparing
oneself to others – Giving up
easily – Avoiding effort –
Making excuses – Feeling
threatened by other's
successes - and

PERFECTIONISM

Do we really know what perfectionism means?

Contrary to what it sounds like,
perfectionism is NOT making sure we
do things perfectly.

Perfectionism is often found in
behaviors such as:

Procrastination

Beating yourself up for mistakes

Avoiding things that we "can't" do
"perfectly"

Hiding our true selves from others

Unhealthy competition





Perfect is not of this world

“Perfectionism is a self-destructive and addictive belief system that fuels this primary thought: If I look perfect, and do everything perfectly, I can avoid or minimize the painful feelings of shame, judgment, and blame.”

Brené Brown, social scientist, author

Self-Talk

How we talk to ourselves, our inner voice.

It combines conscious thoughts with inbuilt beliefs and biases to create an internal monologue throughout the day.

It has a big impact on how you feel and what you do.



Self-Talk is important

Healthy development means that children absorb their caregiver's guidance as they try to navigate the world on their own. Have you ever overheard children as they play alone? How they correct, redirect, encourage their toys?



When Mindset meets Self-Talk

Tending towards Fixed

I am no good at that

When I share my work, people just want to tear you down

This is the second rejection of my article – they are idiots!

I am a total disaster – no one else would do this!

Tending towards Growth

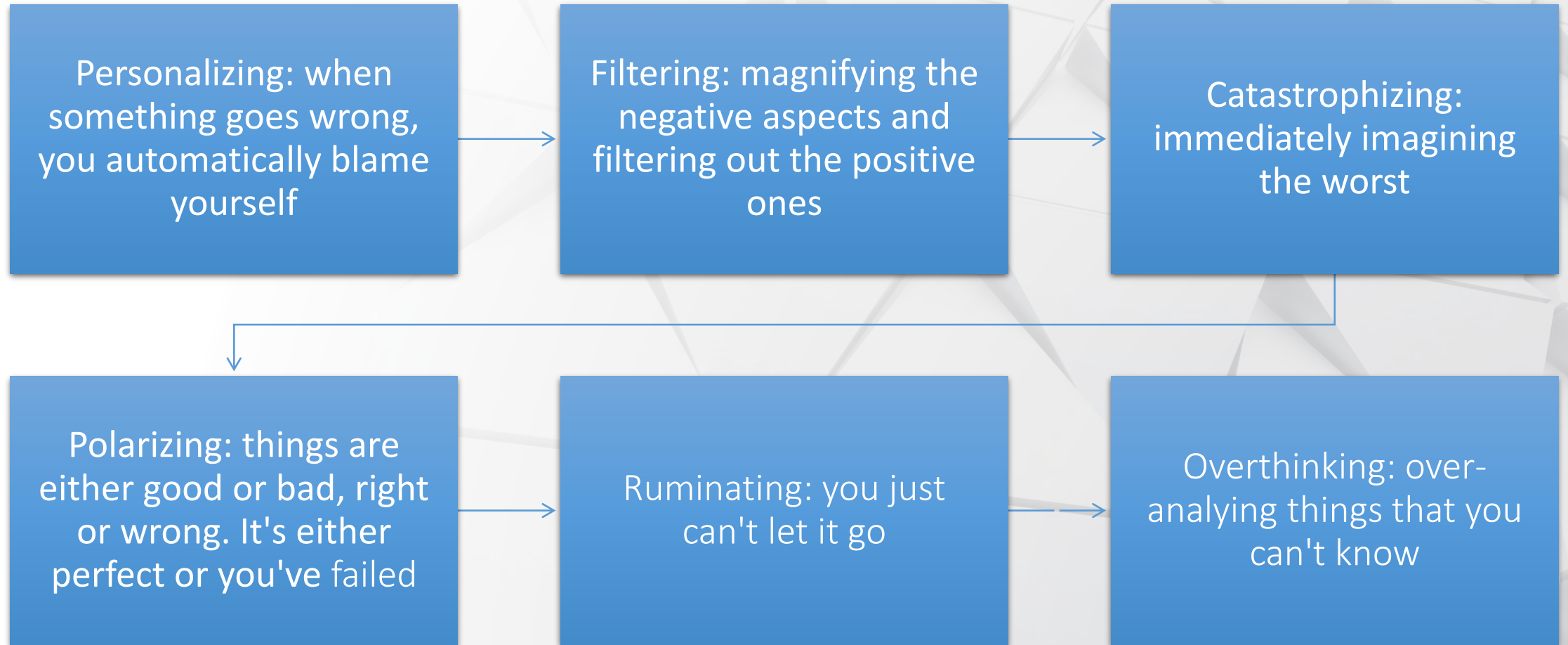
I am not very good at that yet

Feedback can help me see my work with new eyes

A lot of important work gets rejected initially. What other journals are there?

I messed that up. How can I make amends?

Unhelpful Self-Talk: what's your favorite flavor?



Look out for times of fatigue and stress

The Self-Talk usually gets more
critical and less objective!

The best remedy: go to bed and
sleep at least 8 hours, then see
what that same problem feels like
in the morning!





Gaining awareness of your Self-Talk

Keep a diary for a few days to a week and take it with you everywhere you go. Pay close attention to your self-talk and make a note of:

- Is it mostly encouraging and reassuring, or harsh and demeaning?
- What events, people or scenarios generate critical self-talk?
- How would a true friend talk to you about this?
- Are there any common threads in your self-talk?



When that Unhelpful Self-Talk appears...

Ask yourself:

- Where does this belief come from?
- Is the information this belief is based on fact or opinion?
- Why do I believe this?
- How accurate is it?

Kind Curiosity is Key

The idea is not to eliminate the critical or negative self-talk

It's to be CURIOUS about it!

Become FRIENDLY with it!

These thoughts and emotions are nothing but INFORMATION that may require several things:

- integration of your recent experiences and awareness
- A shift in perspective, seeing Unhelpful Self-Talk as you protecting yourself from the sting of mistakes
- An update of your operating system!



Now let's get in pairs

Think about a challenge that you have faced, one that you think was unfair, or embarrassing, or just plain hard.

You have 4 minutes:

Tell your story to your partner, while they simply listen.

Then, your partner will ask you, "In what way have you grown from this? What unexpected gifts did it bring?"

Think about it, explore it with them.

Then, return the favor.

We will come back in 15 minutes.





What does vulnerability have to do with Growth Mindset?

"If we can share our story with someone who responds with empathy and understanding, shame can't survive." (B. Brown)

When we stay in a fixed mindset, we are trying to protect ourselves.

But **shame** is a strict jailer.



And once you think
you've achieved it,
life will show you
what else you need
to see

Johari Window

The Johari Window is a framework for understanding conscious and unconscious bias that can help increase self-awareness and our understanding of others.

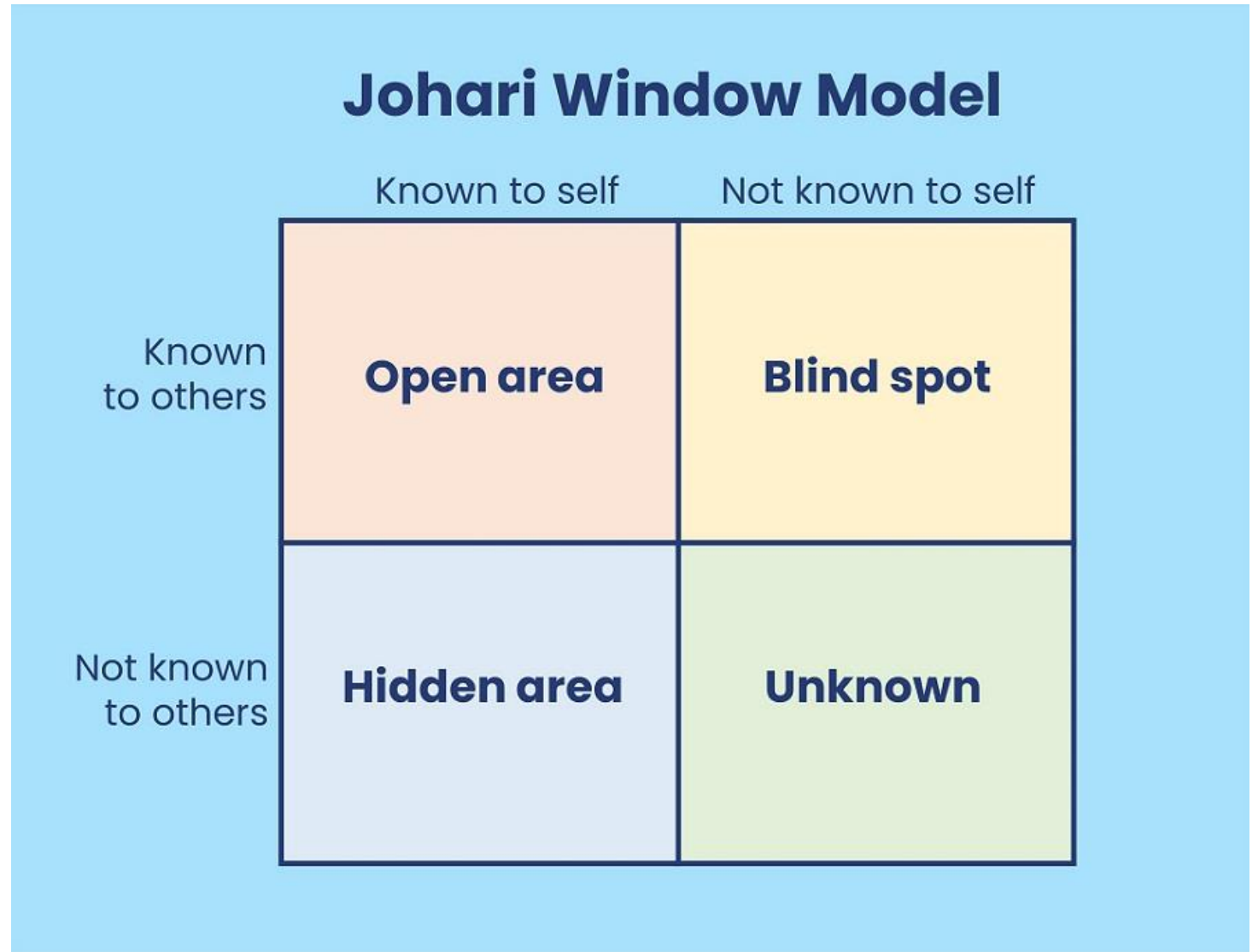
Created by psychologists Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham, who named the model by combining their first names.

It is composed of four quadrants in which people can identify what they know about themselves and what other people know about them.

The quadrants

Create a Johari window on your paper, with the 4 quadrants, following my instructions.

Then get in groups of 4 and compare!





Final words on being vulnerable

"Owning our story can be hard but not nearly as difficult as spending our lives running from it. Embracing our vulnerabilities is risky but not nearly as dangerous as giving up on love and belonging and joy—the experiences that make us the most vulnerable. Only when we are brave enough to explore the darkness will we discover the infinite power of our light."

Brené Brown