



# **The Art of Future Ready Leadership**

*Module 1: The Power of Observation*

# What is Observation?

Consider the following three kinds of ways to view a situation:

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Seeing</b> (biological capability)     | Noticing and capturing what's in front of our eyes |
| <b>Observation</b> (behavioral skill)     | Intentionally making sense of what we see          |
| <b>Vision</b> (core attribute of leaders) | Using our observations to construct meaning        |

**Exercise:** What do you think are your most important strengths in these areas? List three.

We can also apply the same framework to thinking about how we receive sensory inputs. For example:

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Hearing</b> (biological capability)                  | Noticing and capturing what reaches our ears.  |
| <b>Listening</b> (behavioral skill)                     | Making sense of what we hear, paying attention to what people say about their needs and desires, and separating the signal from the noise. |
| <b>Reflective Listening</b> (core attribute of leaders) | Using our listening as a foundation for constructing meaning.  |

**Exercise:** Which of these skills would you most like to strengthen? Why?

## Why Observation is a Vital Skill for Leaders

Take a moment to consider one of your communities – it could be work, school, family, politics, sports, hobby or faith. Think back to the last time you were directly involved with something going on in that community.

**Briefly reflect and journal on:**

What did you see?

How did you make sense of what you saw?

What deeper meaning were you able to draw from your observation (vision)?

Now consider your effectiveness as a leader in applying seeing, observation and vision.

**Exercise:** What are your most important strengths in these areas? Which would you most like to further strengthen, and why?

## What Do You See?

Take a careful look at this 17th-century masterpiece by Peter Bruegel. Look intently at it for 15 seconds. Time yourself!



**Exercise:** What do you see ?



**Exercise: Look again, for another 15 seconds.** What new or more do you see in your second viewing?

**Exercise: Look one more time, again for 15 seconds.** Did you notice any new details or patterns?

**Exercise:** What types of things did you miss the first time but emerged later?

**Exercise:** Now, look once more for 15 seconds. There's a lot going on in this picture. What *don't* you see?



**Exercise:** What does this exercise suggest about how to see, observe, and envision the world? About your leadership?



## Skill 1: Seeing What's There

Look carefully at this image (30 seconds).



**Exercise:** Now, list five things that stood out to you in this image.

**Exercise:** Now, list five things that stood out to you in this image. Next, form a closed circle with your thumb and another finger and use the circle as a view finder. Bring the circle close to the painting, aim it at a smaller section of the image and look carefully. What do you see that you hadn't seen earlier?

Now, look at the same painting from a new perspective:



**Exercise:** Write down three things you just observed that you hadn't seen before.



Let's try another one. Look carefully at this image for 30 seconds:



**Exercise:** List five things that stood out to you in this image.

Next, form a closed circle with your thumb and another finger and use the circle as a view finder. Bring the circle close to the painting, aim it at a smaller section of the image and look carefully.

**Exercise:** What do you see now that you hadn't seen earlier?

Finally, look at the same painting from a new perspective:



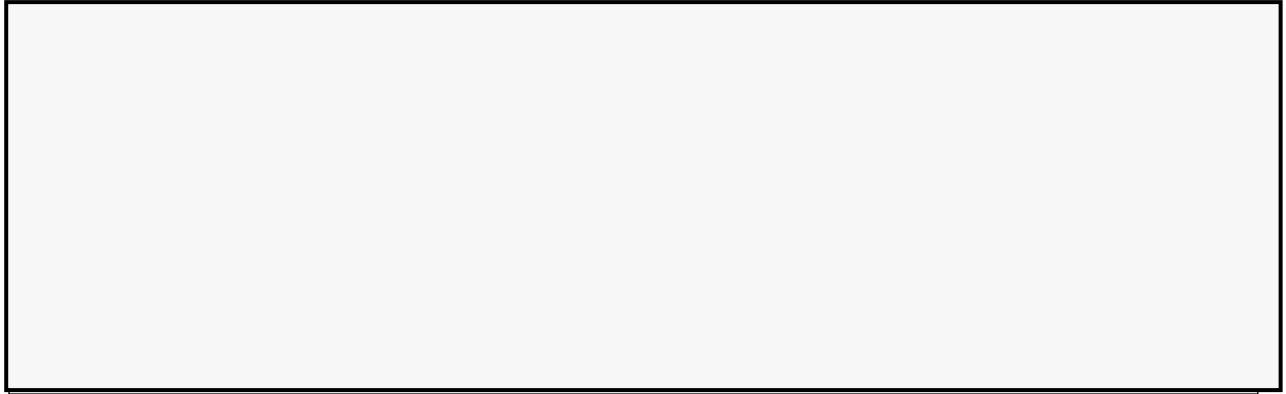
**Exercise:** Write down three things you just observed that you hadn't seen before

What did you learn from these activities? How can you apply what you learned to developing yourself as a leader?

**Exercise:** Take a moment to record your reflections.

How might you strengthen your skill at seeing what's there?

**Exercise:** Share your thoughts on how you might improve this skill.

A large, empty rectangular box with a black border, intended for writing responses.

## How Good Are You at Seeing What's There?

Please share your reflections about these two videos.

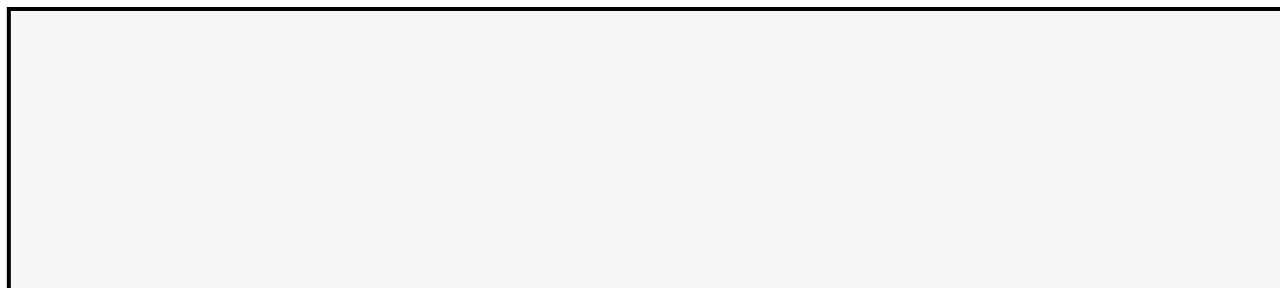
**Exercise:** What did you learn about yourself? How can you apply what you just learned to help you as a leader?

## Skill 2: Seeing What's Not There

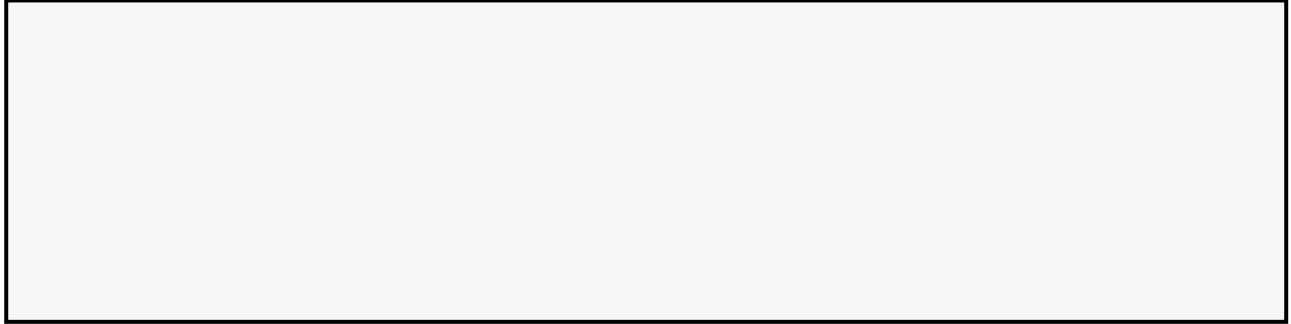
Take a good look at this image:



**Exercise:** Describe what you see.



**Exercise:** Describe what you see in this one.



**The second image** is the complete picture. It contains both the bottles and the spaces behind and between them. **The first image** is only partial; it's missing the shadowy detail that helped define the bottles.

In art, we call that empty space “negative space.”

Now, take a close look at these pictures – specifically the interplay of positive and negative space.



**Exercise:** what does each image tell you about the team and what’s going on in the meeting?



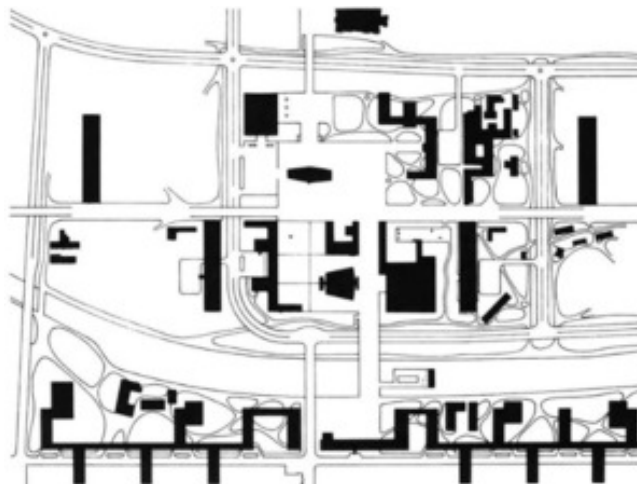
Take a good look at this image of an urban neighborhood. The black spaces are built objects, the white spaces are open. Take 30 seconds.



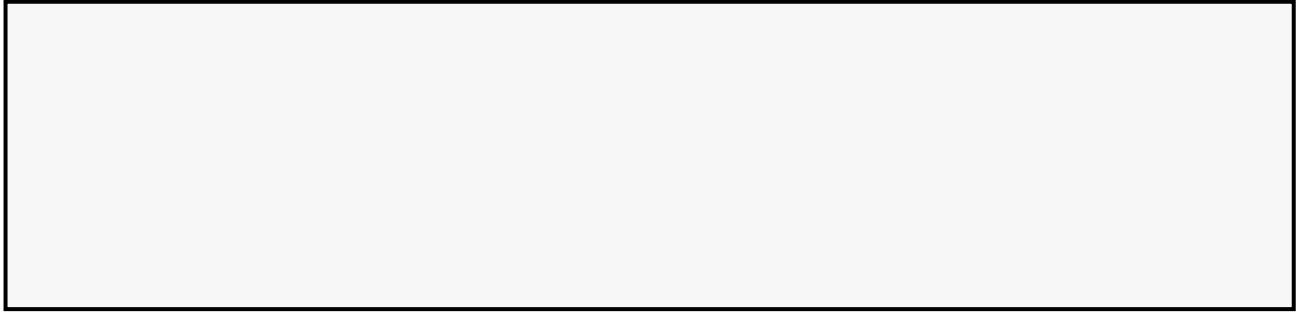
**Exercise:** What kinds of activities and relationships can you envision in this environment?



Now, look at this neighborhood. (30 seconds)



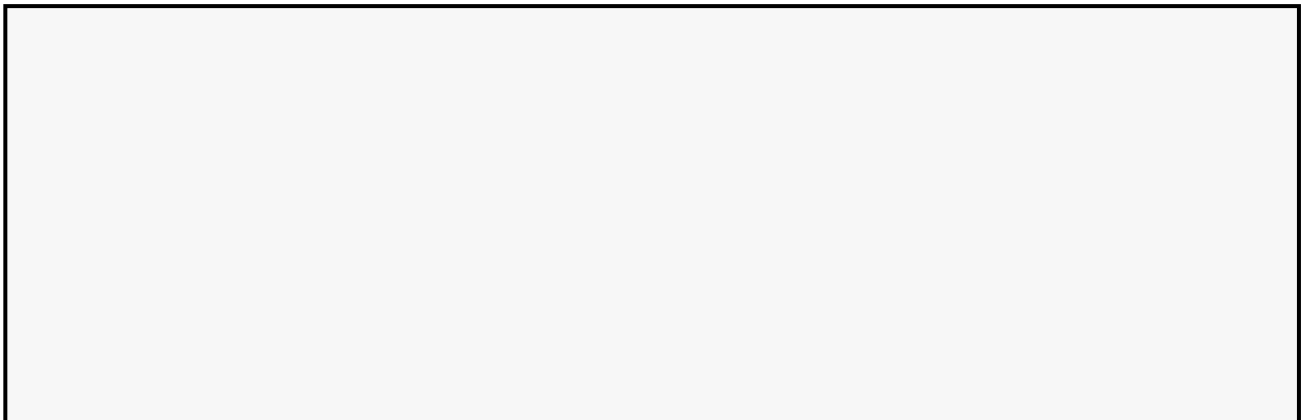
**Exercise:** What kinds of activities and relationships can you envision in this environment?



**Exercise:** Sketch a simple representation of some portion of your organization's space in this same black-and-white style.



**Exercise:** Think about the activities and relationships you want to foster as a leader. Do they fit well within the space you just drew? If not, how would you modify the space to work better for those activities?





## Emotions in Reflection

Look at this image carefully (15 seconds)



**Exercise:** What do you observe?

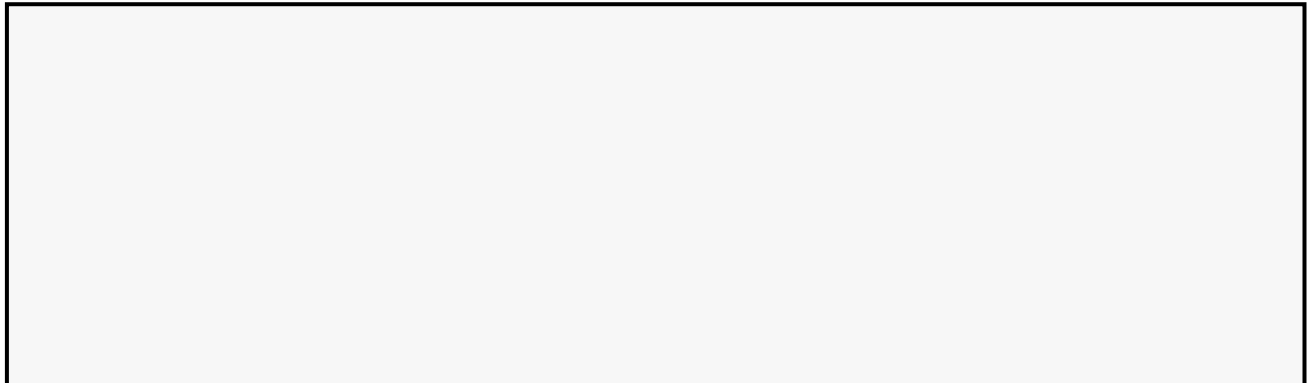
Look again for another 15 seconds.

**Exercise:** What more do you observe?



Look one more time. (15 seconds)

**Exercise:** What feelings our feelings does this image evoke in you?



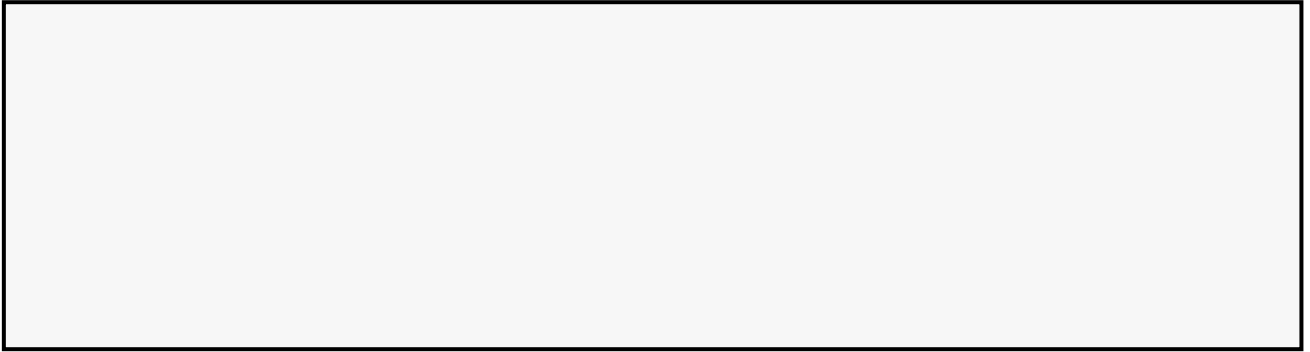
Now go deeper.

**Exercise:** What specific details are you observing that evokes these feelings?



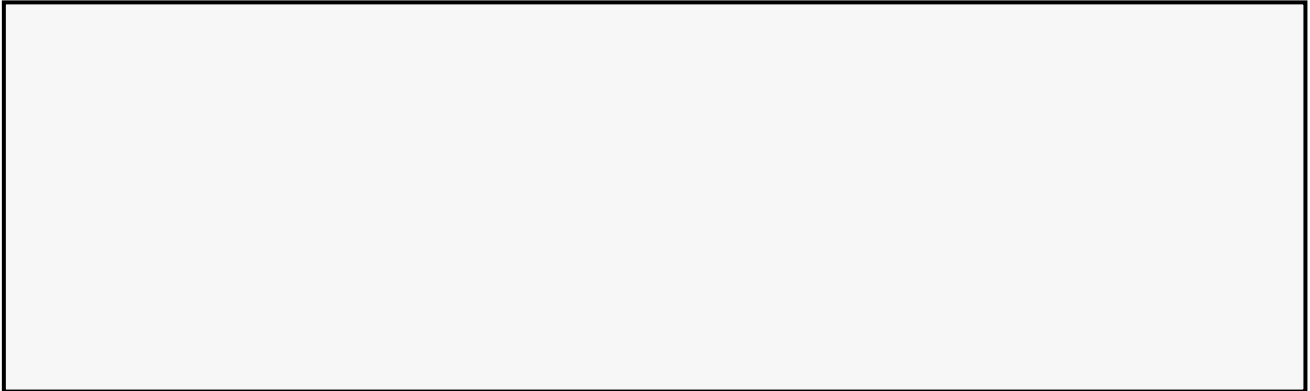
What do you think is going on?

**Exercise:** Describe what's happening in the image.



Reflect on what this exercise suggests about how feelings shape your observations.

**Exercise:** Think about one or two examples of people and situations you've observed. Can you identify ways in which what you saw was impacted by your emotions?



## Skill 4: Finding the Meaning in What You See

Look carefully at these seemingly unrelated objects:

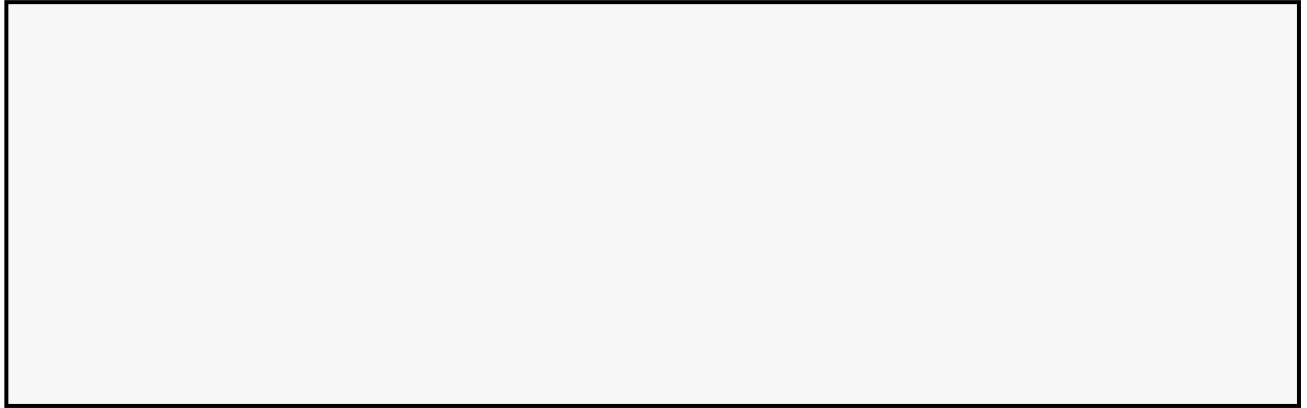


Look again.

**Exercise:** Now, list at least three elements (features, attributes, or uses) that all three of these objects have in common.

Now, bring the objects together in a single situation.

**Exercise:** Write a three-sentence story that features all three objects. Incorporate one or more of the common elements you just identified.



Look once more. This time, pick one of the three objects.

**Exercise:** List at least two elements (features, attributes, or uses) that the object you picked does **not** have in common with the other two objects.

Now, write another three-sentence story that centers on the differences between the object you picked and the other two objects



## Storytelling and Metaphor

Think of a situation you observed in which a leader made effective use of a story or metaphor. Consider the following:

- What was the situation?
- What metaphor or story did the leader use? Who was the audience?
- What made the use of the metaphor or story effective?
- What role did the metaphor or story play in achieving a successful outcome?
- What stands out to you as most memorable about the story or metaphor?

**Exercise:** Take a few moments and reflect on these questions. Then describe your thinking.

**Exercise:** Think of your responses to the above as a case study. What does this case study suggest to you about the role of metaphor and story in leadership? What can you learn and apply to your own leadership?