

2 Getting to Know Our Minds Better

2B1 Lesson — Identifying Criteria to be Alert About

As we discussed in 2B Lesson, driving a vehicle is one of the best places to begin practicing increased alertness. This particular activity can also help us understand the active detailing involved in becoming more self-aware. This lesson explains the importance of knowing just what to be alert about while driving as well as while getting to know our minds better.

What Do I Need to Be Alert About?

Having a watchful concern toward how skillfully and appropriately we are applying our minds overall is essential to developing healthier minds. It is through this conscious concern that we track the quality of our thoughts, communications, and behavior more closely.

As mentioned in 2B Lesson, being aware of the current quality of our driving is necessary to become more particular about our driving skills. Similarly, we must increase our awareness about the current quality of our thoughts, communications and behavior to become more particular about how well our minds are operating. How accurately we can define the current quality of our driving relates to how accurately we can define our current level of healthy mind development; both rely on how familiar we are with the criteria involved and the value of paying closer attention to those particular details.

To drive, we should already be familiar with much of the criteria involved and understand the value of alert attention to driving. That's why it is one of the best places to practice increasing our alertness and to understand the active detailing involved in becoming more self-aware.

BEING PURPOSEFUL ABOUT ALERTNESS

Webster's Dictionary defines *alertness* as: "keenly attentive, watchful, trenchant, actively observant." Alertness has also been described as being totally present, mindful, consciously concerned or, more abstractly, being on the ball and having all the lights on in our heads. When we combine such active attention with familiarity of the particular detailing involved, we have a clearer basis to work from in order to improve any particular skill. In this lesson, the skills we are concerned to improve are self-awareness and driving.

Considering all the benefits of alertness, it's easier to understand why alertness would be among the most important mind functions to learn to more skillfully and consistently apply. Yet, without attention toward alertness itself and knowing what to be alert about, it can be difficult to apply. It's kind of like looking for our eyeglasses and needing the glasses or further clues to find them.

Without being purposeful about alertness, our minds can subtly and/or erratically wander to and from a high, medium and low range of attention. If we aren't careful, our minds can stray from engaged, guarded alertness to casual attention or even complacency without our realizing that it is happening. We can miss subtle cues, without heightened alertness, clues that could otherwise provide healthier direction.

We might further compare the complexity of practicing alertness while driving to that of an orchestra conductor's timely multitasking skills. While driving alertly, we carefully learn to timely alternate between viewing the road in front of us and scanning the wide-angled scene around us—to zooming in and focusing on more obscure, yet important details of direction, caution and courtesy. This pivotal kind of attention can also remind us of the focus features of technically sophisticated photographic equipment. Thus, alertness could be considered part of a high-tech approach to how we use the mind.

There are many other life experiences that require similar heightened attention; actually, any experience that requires us to be concerned about how alert we are and how skillfully we are doing whatever we are doing requires heightened attention. In our work lives, an employee's alert attention to important details can play a major role in appropriately justifying a pay raise or even keeping a job. Our alertness while playing games can make the difference between gaining points and winning . . . or losing. Remaining alert while playing a musical instrument helps eliminate mistakes. Practicing alertness in school increases a student's ability to learn more readily and improve grades.

IDENTIFYING ALERTNESS CRITERIA WHILE DRIVING

While driving, the priority of the moment is to pay close attention to the quality of our driving. Alertness toward this can expose a higher concentration of detailing than casual attention. With the unpredictable dynamics of driving, to practice improving our alertness while at the wheel is no less important than practicing improving it for other life experiences. In fact, while driving may, at any time, be the one place we practice alertness that saves our lives or the lives of others. It is emotionally intelligent to better our odds on many things in life. The better we pay attention, while driving, the better our odds of not having an accident.

Granted, an accident today may be a remote possibility. Nonetheless, just as we wouldn't go on the highway without auto insurance to prevent financial stress, it is to our benefit to not go on the highway without an alert mind—in order to remain safe and prevent more devastating stress. And just as we would seriously pay attention in any other job that could go awry within only three seconds of distraction, driving warrants such attention, as well—aside from being an excellent way to improve self-awareness.

IN CONCLUSION: Self-Aware Driving

We must remember that as human civilization has evolved, our species as a whole has not been driving motorized vehicles for even a full century—and at such high speeds for less time. No one can deny that driving has the potential to be hazardous. Perhaps, however, we need to understand more about our own behavior at the wheel that can put us in harm's way—than we do. As yet, the most common accidents that result in the most debilitating injuries are still on the roadways. Many of us have already experienced accidents and know many others who have been in accidents. Some people are left with tragic physical problems, including lost limbs and other handicaps.

Do we get enough education to absorb all the criteria we need to, not just be somewhat familiar with, but keenly aware of — all the *important* laws, do's and don'ts, rules and guidelines of driving safely and navigating the human mind, healthfully? Is actual memorization or over-learning a necessary part of keeping ourselves safe on the highways and off? As civilization becomes more familiar with the complexities of the human mind, there may be many shifts in our priorities—especially the amount of time we spend educating ourselves about certain subjects. Perhaps further education on driving and understanding our own minds better will move much higher on our priorities list in this century.

In concluding this lesson, we will share a few tools that identify a number of criteria to be alert about to help ward-off potential problems.

See: **Alert Driver's Test**

Departure Check-List

You may also want to take a look through Lesson 7B - *A Comprehensive Speaker Evaluation* at this time. Its content is a revealing example of another function, besides driving, which can require combining and coordinating with precision, a wide range of elements, rules and guidelines. Although speakers learn to improve these skills over a period of time, it would be overwhelming for the novice to consider trying to practice all these skills at the same time, initially! The same holds true about the wide range of elements, rules and guidelines to consider practicing to become more self-aware and improve emotional intelligence. They are best practiced a few at a time to prevent overwhelm.

PLEASE NOTE: Remember at this point to continue reading through Lesson 3 group, if you haven't previously done so, before beginning the suggested activities.