How well do you really know your team?

I've worked at Arbinger for six years. I've been through countless workshops, read Arbinger's books multiple times, and work with our content daily. In short, I'm no stranger to Arbinger's philosophies.

This past year has changed a lot about the way organizations and teams function. Working remotely (often with a spouse and/or children at home) has brought an array of challenges that have encouraged us to adapt and grow together as an organization. With this in mind, we have all made a conscientious effort to stay connected and keep our lines of communication open and clear.

A Realization

Last week, we had our annual company meeting. Our first-ever—completely virtual—company meeting. Instead of starting out with the standard department reviews, process trainings, and forecasting, the entire company went through part of our virtual *Developing and Implementing an Outward Mindset* training to gain insight into our customer experience.

During one of our breakout sessions, we were put into groups of three and spent about 20 minutes using Arbinger's Meet to

Learn tool. If you haven't been through one of Arbinger's workshops, Meet to Learn is a tool for learning about the objectives, needs, and challenges of others. As a group, we gave each person a turn to be interviewed, and it was everyone else's job to learn as much as we could about the that person. The sole objective of the exercise is to become genuinely curious about others and position ourselves to be more helpful.

Part-way through the exercise, I was struck by something:

I don't really know these people.

I see them on Zoom multiple times a week. I work on projects with them. I produce things that directly impact the things they do. I consider them friends.

But I don't really know them.

Using a tool I've practiced and discussed and written about for years, I learned new insights about the goals, challenges, and frustrations of the people I've worked with since graduating from college.

Practice Breeds Awareness

Without fail, no matter how well we understand what an outward mindset is and know why it's where we want to be, we will always—always—find ourselves turn inward, becoming self-focused and failing to see others as people. As humans, we will continually struggle to notice, connect, and collaborate as effectively as we'd like to.

Trying to maintain an outward mindset can [feel like riding a backwards bicycle](). We understand how it should work but consistently implementing it is a different story.

But it's not hopeless.

What struck me the most about this experience is that I've gone through the exercise with the very same people before. As I said above, I'm no stranger to what an outward mindset is and how I should be working with my team. Theoretically, I should have known what they were going to say.

We don't "attain" an outward mindset, and our work is never done. It's a journey, and along this journey things change, people develop, and life happens, which means we need to make a regular practice of being alive to our impact on others.

Transitioning to working from home, downsizing, shifting roles, accommodating schedules, or adjusting budgets are obvious reasons why someone's objectives, needs, and challenges might change.

In fact, I could have used this as my excuse for why I didn't know about some of the things my coworkers were facing. It was a crazy, chaotic year.

Instead, it should be an example of why it's so important to continually ask questions, learn about, and assess our impact on others—regardless of how well we know someone and how clear we think our understanding is. If I can learn more about someone I already know, what might I learn about those who I don't? There's always more to learn. There's always time to practice being outward.

It's a powerful feeling to leave a meeting knowing exactly how our work impacts someone else. To know that a slight shift in the things we do can make someone else's work dramatically easier. To know that what you're doing matters.