

The SOG Plan

April 28, 2013 by Ken Sande

Do you know an impulsive teenager? A frustrated wife? A detached husband? A resentful employee? A relationally clumsy pastor? If so, read on.

Six years ago I developed a relational tool called “the SOG plan” as an alternative to selling my teenage daughter.

When Megan hit fifteen, her emotions went into hyper-drive. Her limbic system (the emotional part of the brain) was fully wired. But as is the case with all of us, her prefrontal cortex (the rational part of the brain) would not finish developing for another decade.

That’s right, the brain continues to physically change until our mid-twenties, and the part that restrains impulsive behavior develops last! Combine this typical teenage imbalance with original sin, and you have a child whose life is often characterized by self-absorption, careless decisions, rash words, and clashes with mom and dad.

Wanting to help Megan learn how to control her emotions and impulses, I developed a strategy called “the SOG Plan,” which stands for being:

Self-Aware
Other-Aware, and
God-Aware

This simple acronym was not a panacea. But as Megan and the rest of our family developed the habit of channeling our thoughts, emotions, and actions through this grid, our relationships steadily improved.

We found that the best way to implement the SOG Plan was to develop the habit of asking ourselves the following types of questions.

Self-aware: How am I feeling and acting? More specifically ...

What am I feeling? (Typical answers: competitive, irritated, insecure, envious, embarrassed, defensive, frustrated, fearful, angry, hopeless)

Why do I feel this way? (I failed at something. Didn’t get what I want. Fear I’ll lose something. Someone criticized me. Tried to control me. Betrayed me.)

What am I inclined to do? (Assume I know more than others. Clam up. Speak too much or too forcefully. Accuse or justify. Press others to see things my way.)

What will I do instead? (Listen patiently. Seek to understand. Avoid jumping to conclusions. Speak gently and graciously.)

Other-aware: How am I affecting others? More specifically ...

What do others seem to be feeling? (Note their words, body language, tone of voice)

What do others seem to need? Want? Fear?

How am I impacting others? (Am I confusing, irritating, frustrating, hurting, judging, manipulating, or punishing them?)

Is this really the best time to talk, counsel, or correct?

How can I serve others? Look out for their interests?

How can I demonstrate genuine love and forgiveness?

God-aware: How is God involved? More specifically ...

Who is God? What is he like?

What could he be up to in this situation?

Am I acting in faith or unbelief? Do I trust in him or myself?

What difference does the gospel make?

How can I pray? What Scriptures can guide me?

How can I show that I love, trust, and obey God above all things?

These questions have many variations. The point is that we always need to be thinking three-dimensionally, to be self-aware, other-aware, and, most-importantly, God-aware.

This is the essence of relational wisdom. It works for impulsive teens like my daughter, who is now twenty-one, thriving spiritually, relationally, and academically, and glad to have me share her story.

By God's grace, it can also work for you and me. At home, in the workplace, and at church. However frustrated, detached, resentful, or relationally clumsy we or others might be at times, God can use something as simple as a SOG Plan to steadily transform our lives and relationships.

– Ken Sande

Reflection questions:

Which elements of the SOG Plan are described by the following passages: Matt. 22:37-39; Eph. 4:30-32; Phil. 2:1-11; Col. 3:12-17).

Think of someone who seems to be exceptionally self-aware. Other-aware. God-aware. How does it show in their lives?

Which of their awareness skills would you most like to develop? Why?

Which of these three dimensions is most important? Why?

To learn more about how to apply the SOG plan in your life, visit [Discover Relational Wisdom](#).

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