

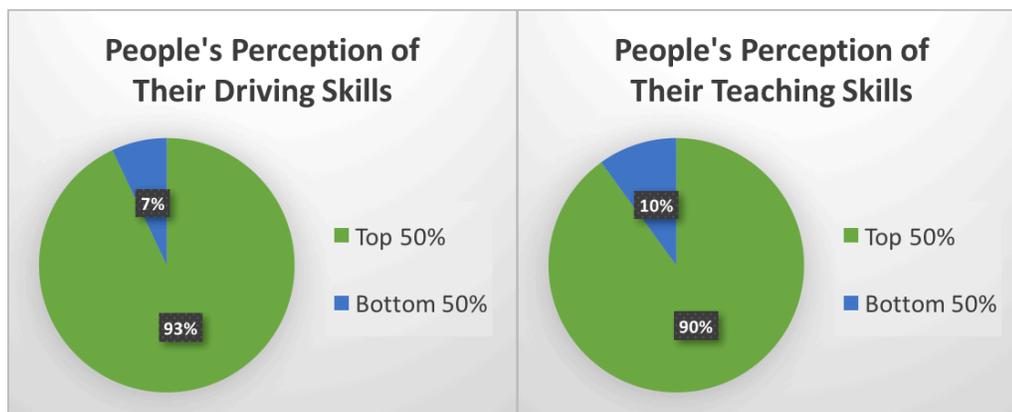


## Civil Discourse

Whether at work, home, or involved with the community, leaders need mastery in Civil Discourse. Civil discourse, the combination of **being a good townsman who is seeking a new truth**, is essential to move issues forward in a way that can engage others. Being civil includes being courteous, but, even more importantly, includes being committed. We want people to speak truth toward a commitment (otherwise, it is merely complaint). Without civility, people will not listen and instead will entrench further into their own views. The practice of discourse is where an idea is exposed to further vetting to challenge the existing truths, refine them further, or to explore and build new possibilities and new truths.

We need this level of vetting, one that requires consideration of the other stakeholders in the pursuit of truth, because *humans are not particularly good at judging their own abilities*. There are a number of ways in which even the smartest people can fall into self-deception; one significant one is termed cognitive biases. It is the Lake Wobegon Effect, the fictional town created by Garrison Keillor where, "All the women are strong, all the men are good looking, and all the children are above average." We often live in our own self-constructed positive illusion.

The idea that we would trick ourselves seems absurd to most people. But consider some data below. People often way overestimate their abilities, and two studies show that we most people place themselves in the top 90<sup>th</sup> percentile of expertise:



A couple more tidbits to challenge your own self-perception...

- IQ: Men tend to overestimate their intelligence by 5 points, while women underestimate their IQ by 5 points.
- Listening to the News: Only 17% of listeners could recall the news when not cued, and when cued, recall never exceeded 25%. We only thought we were really listening.



While we all could use a full serving of humility as a start, there are some ways to approach a conversation that can create more opening for yourself and others:

- **Good Intention:** Start with assuming others come to the conversation with a good intention.
- **Winning is Not the Object:** Let go of winning, and frame conversations as mutual discovery. Listen to learn, and not to rebut.
- **Style Preferences:** Each person in a conversation has their own communication preference for speaking and listening. Be willing to meet people in their style and not make our own preference a requirement for everyone else.
- **Listening at Rest:** We often listen with a busy mind and a busy body. Plant your feet on the floor and pay attention to your breathing. As your thoughts come rushing in, tell yourself, “not right now,” so you can pay attention to the speaker.
- **Listen More, Speak Less:** If you are conducting a one-hour meeting on a subject with 6 total people in the room, that leaves less than ten minutes per person; the leader should not dominate that time.
- **Ask Questions to Uncover:** Pay attention to what questions you want to ask and how you ask them. Use “Why” questions sparingly, as they can make people defensive. For example, “Why do you think that?” can be reframed into “What makes you come to that conclusion.” Both questions will help you deepen your understanding, but if you create defensiveness in how you ask, it will take longer.
- **Leaders Need Assessments:** The data says so. And leaders ask those they lead for assessments. That is, after all, why you hired them in the first place.

More than anything, ***be willing to be disturbed***. Fundamentally, the definition of being disturbed is having a familiar pattern disturbed, and that is at the core of leadership. Listening is harder work than speaking. The *purpose of conversation is to disturb* the current thinking and perceptions such that there are better solutions and better futures.