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The Leader's Cookbook

By Rudy M. Miick, FCSI

Be Aware of Your Strengths

Recently one of my clients asked that I work with their leadership team to move into “the next level” of performance. The goal was to put into action practices that would support each member of the team to “BE” remarkable and A+ in their performance.”

Step 1 of the exercise is to define “A+ performance” for each participant. If you haven’t done this for yourself, or your leadership team, you should do so first. This is a great exercise that most teams don’t actually do. But, what I want to share with you in this column is what we do in **Step 2**.

Step 2: Deep Exploration!

What follows is a highly interactive and beneficial process that Miick & Associates conducts with our clients. Know in advance, that by the end of our day together there will be many breakthroughs in personal learning marked by “ahaas” and “now I get it”.

This exercise has three parts. Read your way through here and try it yourself!

Part 1: As a leader, name your greatest strength. This ought to be pretty straightforward. You’ve focused on developing this strength, this asset, for years. What is it? Challenge your answer. Make sure it’s what you *really* do best.

Part 2: As a leader, what is your greatest fear? (Name your actual fear, not the outcome of the fear) Ask yourself what are you afraid of; for example, what is it that limits you, what’s holding you back. Explore. When you think you’ve got it, go deeper.

Part 3: Now that you’ve named your greatest fear:

1. Notice how your greatest strength, feeds off your deepest fear.

As a leader, you have many strengths. If not, you wouldn’t be where you are now. Now, think about the *relationship* of your greatest fear to your greatest strength. What do you notice? In support of the exercise, I want you to close your door, or go for a walk alone, maybe go sit under a tree for bit. Whatever you need to do, spend some time pondering this question and be honest with yourself.

2. Notice how relying so much on your greatest strength keeps you stuck.

As a leader, have you ever felt like you’ve been blindsided? Ever feel like you’ve been dramatically let down, disappointed? Ever realize that when you do get blindsided or disappointed it’s usually from some similar type event or action? Most leaders *don’t* notice this. I



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invite you to slow down and actually take a look in the mirror. Take a look and see how your habits are, well, habits.

Getting caught by surprise, or regularly let down is a classic outcome of playing to your strong side as a habit. Maybe one of your staff asked a question, made a statement, or offered a possibility that you hadn't conceived? Maybe something on a budget caught you by surprise. Maybe one of your key people just didn't cut it. What was/is your role in that outcome? I invite you to simply notice how your habits using your strengths, impacted you and your team. When you're caught by surprise, investigate, reflect, and take a look in the mirror.

3. Notice how your fear stops you, and step into that fear. EXPERIMENT here!

Being fearless doesn't mean being stupid. So, don't be. And, by the time you've gotten where you are now, you've worked so hard on being effective, that your fears are more than likely unjustified. So, why not explore a bit. One of the great quotes, "there's nothing to fear but fear itself" rings true for most leaders with whom I've worked.

World champion boxer James Braddock (the movie: Cinderella Man) out of necessity, no other choice, had to strengthen his left hand, previously his weakness. Outcome: he became world champion, even though many thought him actually over the hill in age and fitness. Until he had too, Braddock never focused on his left. By the time we're adults, especially successful adults, fears tend to have created more weakness, read skill-less-ness, than is justified.

To take your skill to the next level, step into your fear. From our experience with clients, you'll get blindsided less often and achieve better results.

4. Please keep asking yourself...

Many leaders hit the target, but not the bull's eye in their persona and communication. Often times fear is what gets in the way of clarity. Direct feedback, having real conversations in the moment is critical to success in our fast paced industry. Here are four steps I offer my clients. Each of the four steps is a variation on the other, use each and all as serves you:

i. What's the real question? Ask it.

I want to find management candidates that hold themselves accountable, and do what they say they will do; leaders who will learn from a mistake once and course correct in the future.

Instead of asking traditional questions like, "What do you think are great traits in a leader?" How do you show up with those traits?" (Hoping they're going to mention accountability.) Cut to the chase. Let the first "question" be direct, something to the effect of, "Tell me about a time you made a big mistake and what you did to course correct it, what did you do to ensure it didn't happen again."

Notice if the answer feels real, does it go deep? What ever is shared is what this candidate senses *is a real* mistake. Notice how the answer fits your sense of integrity, of willingness to go deeper than superficial, or is the answer something easy, shallow. Is



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there a match for you? If yes, go on. If no, pay attention, this person's performance won't show up any better than it does right now.

Every day performance is an interview. Is there cause to celebrate? To course-correct? In either case do it now, not six months from now in some semi-annual performance review.

ii. What's the real statement? Make it.

Hold both the intimate and strategic elements of relationship at work. I can like you as an individual and not be pleased at all about your performance. Offer feedback in the moment, you're on a fast track, and as a leader, your team deserves to hear from you.

iii. What's the real action? Do it.

What's your gut telling you? Listen. Be mindful, aware, not in fear, but in fearlessness. What needs to be done, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd? Do you have the time for your team to decide on actions? Do you facilitate your team to take action? Or is it you who needs to make this action happen?

iv. What's the real conversation? Have it.

You've no doubt heard the story of the proverbial "elephant in the room." The elephant is that topic or issue that everyone (except those new to your team) knows about, and about which, no one talks. The issue is avoided at all costs.

In my experience and research, leaders and team members hold a common fear as having to talk about the "elephant." What I know from experience is that naming an elephant is one of the greatest ways to move a team to the next level of effectiveness. After the fact, I regularly hear, "If we can talk about this, we can pretty much talk about anything." Performance goes up. Elephants go away.

Summary

What's the real conversation? Have it. What's your greatest, deepest fear? Name it. What's the relationship of your greatest strength to your biggest blind spot? By stepping into what's not so easy on the surface, you see you and your team develop performance muscles you didn't know you had.