

Are You a Leadership Lightweight?

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The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines "lightweight" as "one of little consequence or ability." Today it's quite uncommon for a leader or manager to be a lightweight in every aspect of their job. However, a lightweight is a lightweight because there is usually an area or two where he or she must raise the bar in order to improve upon the quality and effectiveness of their work.

The first step in moving forward towards change and transformation, towards becoming more relevant, is to "know what you don't know." Consider these five common areas which often keep leaders and managers stuck in the "lightweight" division.

1. Blaming "it," "her," "him" and "them," for their lack of results.

It's always annoying, disconcerting and frustrating to hear leaders and managers resort to complaining about and blaming external forces for their inability to produce results: the economy, the government, the weather, the competition, the time of year, the inventory, the shareholders, their boss, and the like. Many leaders and managers find it convenient to assume the role of victim and martyr, pointing away from their self to take the focus off their failures, their inefficiencies, their lack of success and the lack of strength and/or courage to step up.

Antidote

The bottom line is the one salient factor that determines success - one's internal decisions - not external forces. Better to look at one's face in the mirror than stare out a window. In reality, leaders and managers can control 80% of what gets in their way (and whether they react/respond to it) so it's important to be conscious and focus on the 80% one can control, rather than the 20% one cannot.

What one can control is their attitude, work ethic, how and where one spends one's time, effort and energy, and with whom with one spends it. One can control one's character, choices and how they attend to and focus on their everyday tasks and responsibilities in an honest, sincere, will-full, self-responsible and disciplined fashion. Until a leader or manager has mastered these aspects of their job (and their self) and moved out of the quicksand of martyrdom and victimhood, "excuses" (not "reasons") will remain part of their DNA as "lightweights).

2. Being reluctant to hold others accountable.

One thing a leader or manager can control is accountability - the key to creating the (healthy) pressure, energy, tension or anxiety to perform the tasks required to sustain organizational culture and produce results.

Antidote

To ensure accountability, and be effective, the leader or manager should:
Have the courage and strength to set clear expectations and make sure they're stretching their

employees (and themselves). Without clear expectations, holding people accountable for results is impossible and, often, an unpleasant experience for everyone involved.

Impose consequences when established behavior and performance standards are not met. If there are no consequences for failing to meet defined goals and targets, leaders and managers are simply perpetuating deficient behavior.

3. Making easy, simple, cheap, popular, convenient and "wrong" decisions

Rather than rock the boat, leaders and managers often end up derailing the team, the unit, the silo and/or the organization. When leaders and managers don't have the intestinal fortitude and the psycho/emotional strength to make hard choices and tough decisions, it may serve them, and others, well to consider moving out of their current position and explore opportunities that are more in sync with their skills and capacities.

Antidote

Quality and excellence do not come as a result of making decisions because they're easy, simple, cheap, popular or convenient. The way a team, unit, silo or organization grows, develops and excels is because one is making decisions that are right, often costly and difficult and, moreover, uncomfortable and inconvenient.

The more uncomfortable a decision feels, the more discomfort a leader or manager experiences in making a choice and, the more likely and probable the potential is for actualization of growth. When a leader or manager spends valuable time hiding in denial, or searching for ways to avoid the discomfort or pain of change, it's a lose-lose situation. Neither the individual nor the team or organization will experience true and real growth.

4. Being too self-reliant

No one is indispensable to their organization - no one! Relax, you may be good, but, you're not that good! What General de Gaulle once said makes sense: *"The graveyard is filled with indispensable men.* And I might add, "Remember the window-washer (on the high-rise building) who stepped back to admire his/her own work." Disaster.

Antidote

Without question, the number one obstacle to building a healthy team or organization is ego. When a leader or manager allows their ego, and its attendant insecurity, to drive their efforts, at the expense of the good of the order, they unfortunately run on a low-level form of cruise-control. Such leaders and managers, often unknowingly or unconsciously, perpetuate the behavior of psychopaths and sycophants, create fear, stifle engagement, adversely affect morale and encourage the best and the brightest to lose interest and, worst of all, leave. A leader or manager must find ways to make their people less, not more, dependent on them. In fact, the greatest measure of a leader or manager's supervision is not how folks perform while they're micro-managing their work but how well folks perform when they're not around.

5. Keeping the wrong people for too long.

The reality is there are always some employees who are so incompetent that even if they do improve to a degree they'll still have too far to go to reach the level of performance you require from them. In many cases, what many leaders and managers do is try to find a way to make that employee not good, better or best, but "not bad." Excellence and quality cannot be achieved by a group of "not bad" folks.

Antidote

When you continue to invest time, energy and money in below-average individuals, with no real upward trend in performance, you're wasting your time, energy and your organization's resources. It's unhealthy - not only for the leader or manager, but for the incompetent employee to whom you are giving a false sense of security, hope, stability, and the like. That leader or manager may also be robbing their high-potential people of the support and attention they need to climb from already-good results to great performances. The leader or manager needs to find a way to honestly, yet compassionately, cut their losses, and redirect their resources to their current and potential solid performers.

There are certainly more genes in the DNA of "lightweight" leaders and managers. However, this is a place to start. There is no crime in discovering, admitting or becoming more self-aware that one is a lightweight. The crime is the reluctance to forward the action of the lightweight into another weight class.

Some questions for self-reflection:

- What outside conditions are you prone to blame for your organization or team's lack of results?
- Whose behavior must you put into check with an effective coaching conversation (with consequences attached) to turn around poor performance? What are you waiting for to initiate this conversation? Do you need to have this conversation with yourself?
- Which of your people have you made less dependent on you by broadening their latitude and discretion?
- What more can you do to make people more capable while you free yourself up to spend more time on high-leverage tasks?
- Who is a "project" on your team that continues to hover at a below-average performance level with no sign of an upward trend? How much more time and money will you invest in this rescue mission? How so? And why?

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I'm grateful for the opportunity to share this reading with you and I hope you find it insightful and useful.

Perhaps you'll share this with others, post it on a bulletin board, and use it to generate rich and rewarding discussion.

What is the one thing that is keeping you from feeling successful, happy, confident, in control or at peace as you live your life - at work, at home, at play or in relationship? Maybe you know what that thing is maybe you don't. You just have a feeling that something has to change, whether or not you embrace that change. And how would that change support you to show up as a "better you?"

I'm available to guide you to create relationships that reflect honesty, integrity, authenticity, trust, and respect whether at work or outside of work. I support you to focus on the interpersonal skills that enable you to relate to others with a high level of personal and professional satisfaction - unhampered by personal inconsistencies, beliefs, "stories," and behaviors that create barriers to a harmonious, pleasant, conscious, compatible, healthy and productive relationship.

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