

Balancing your strengths

As a consultant it is key to know what your strengths are, particularly in the non-technical areas, and to use them to your best advantage. However, you can sometimes overdo things – for example, enthusiasm can also be seen as overbearing. Reflection can also be seen as withdrawal. These aspects can be described as the shiny and the dull side of the “coin” of our behaviours.

“When I meet people who have had a great triumph, I tell them that I hope it doesn’t hurt them too much” Carl Gustav Jung.

Your success can cast a shadow - our approach to some things may not have the impact we intend. We may tip things out of kilter by overdoing or under-doing the way we do things.

The dull side of the coin

Your character can appear flawed when the impact of an attribute becomes more (or less) than what is needed. You can appear ‘out of kilter’ when good aspects of your character have been overstretched or concentrated to the point where they tip the balance of the high performance vehicle you wish to be, and you begin to misfire. The shiny side of the coin can begin to be seen as dull. Let’s explore this through a case study.

Case Study: Manoj

Manoj was a bright leader of a team of consultants. He had always wanted to lead his team to become the top-performing group, and in recognition of this achievement, Manoj had now been promoted to a more responsible position, based on his performance.

When asked what were the characteristics about him that had helped him to achieve his success, he replied. “I am confident in my actions, and not afraid to take big decisions. I have made a big commitment to this job. I am pretty dedicated and the success of the project means a lot to me. I am able to charm and interact well with clients and I have a sense of humour and wit that helps me get along with people. I have clear and high standards and I control everything to ensure that targets are met.”

That all sounded good, and yet I needed to ask Manoj some questions to understand how things were below the surface. “Do you think your team is happy?” “Are you really happy?” “No” and “No” were his responses.

As a successful consultant, you may struggle in the appropriate use of power, relationships, responsibilities, and your own well-being. Or you may not. It is critical to recognise less desirable aspects of your behaviours may be showing your endeavours in a dull light. It may be that you may already have evidence of this, whether it be a stress related condition, tension at work, unhappy relationship, overwhelming fatigue or the need for adrenalin rushes to keep you going.

It may be clear and recognisable or it may just be a whisper that disturbs you. Some of these descriptions may be recognisable in yourself or others.

Listening To the voice of Manoj

For some people, their positive attributes have slipped over to become weaknesses. Manoj went to talk to his team about how they saw his characteristics as a leader so that he could learn from their feedback and make adjustments before he moved to the next step in his career. They did recognise his positive traits and valued them, however they also saw them in a more extreme form on a regular basis.

One of his more senior consultants told me “Manoj would be even better than he is now if he just toned himself down a bit and trusted us to do things for ourselves. He never considers that he might be wrong, and he exhausts himself checking up on us all the time. He is too busy to say we are doing a good job, except when we have a formal review and he has to say it. I have lots of ideas that could make us even better than best, but I don’t say them any more after the last time he made a wise crack when I tried to describe what I had in mind. He says he is committed, but that just means he follows company procedures and policies without regard to the impact on us. He can be ruthless.”

The results of the feedback showed Manoj that he was in danger of drifting to the dull side of his desirable attributes. These showed themselves as follows:

SHINING FORM

Commitment
Confidence
Witty
Brave
Control
Charm
Economic
Dedicated

DULL FORM

Blind faith
Infallibility
Abrasive
Foolhardy
Inflexible
Manipulation
False economy
Workaholic

You might find it an interesting exercise to list your own strengths - your shining character traits, and identify what each one would look like if it took on a dull form.

When you have done this, you will be equipped to ensure that you do not push yourself too far, and that your strengths remain your strengths.

The above case is from the “Leader” book in the series, Be your Best ...and Beyond written by Catherine Doherty and John E Thompson. Catherine runs Fields of Learning where she and John and the rest of their team work with many companies, teams and individuals to help them develop leading performances. Find out more by visiting www.fieldsoflearning.com or call Catherine on 07855 343297