

Leadership Success & Feedback: The Darker Side of Strengths (Part 3)

“Watch us & See How It’s Done”
“We’re Better Than You Are, Period.”
“Trust Us – We Know What We’re Doing”
“Never Settle for Less Than Perfect”

“Delusions of a Dream Company, How Executives Avoid Facing Reality”¹

THE DARKER SIDE OF STRENGTHS

In his landmark book, *High Flyers*², Professor Morgan McCall of Harvard University traces the derailment factors of chief executives. The main factor is what he calls: “The Darker Side of Strengths.” He describes how strengths could become weaknesses.

1. Track Record? This can be misleading: Other people or events may have had more to do with the success than the executive care to admit. Success may have been achieved in destructive ways, or the executive may have moved too fast for the negative consequences to catch up.
2. Brilliance? This can be intimidating to others. Brilliant people sometimes dismiss people they think are less brilliant than them or devalue other people’s ideas or contributions.
3. Commitment? Over commitment may lead to defining one whole life in terms of work and expecting others to do the same; being willing to do anything, including questionable activities to achieve success or treating people as means to an end.
4. Charm? Charm can be used selectively to manipulate others.
5. Ambition? Ambition darkens when people do whatever it takes to achieve personal success at the expense of others or the organization.

To his list, I will add.

6. Responsibility? Overly responsible people tend to do everything themselves, not only will this lead to an early burnout but they will also deprive others the opportunity to work. They are often overly critical of others, who are not like them.
7. Integrity? They possess a ‘holier than thou’ attitude, become self-righteous and zealous crusaders who are insensitive to others.

Here is the conclusion: Any strength can become a weakness.

An Over Utilized Strength Becomes A Weakness

Robbie Ftorek³, coach of the NBA basketball team LA Kings, illustrates a different angle on strengths becoming weaknesses. He was described as good technically and as a good teacher – strengths perfectly suited to the Kings when they were a struggling team with a lot of young, inexperienced players.

As the team matured and acquired veteran players, including superstar Wayne Gretzy, Ftorek’s teaching style was no longer so well received. The more he attempted to tell the veterans how to play, the deeper his former strengths got him into trouble.

The problem with strengths that have led to success is a result of the success itself. It is difficult to abandon what has worked, even when circumstances change, and it may be nearly impossible to give up old patterns if no new skills have been developed to replace the old ones.

Strength Breeds Success, Success Breeds Arrogance

On this topic, McCall writes⁴ “The bright light of their own achievements can blind successful executives; immensely talented people tend to fly too close to the sun, like Icarus.”

Success after success can lead to arrogance. When arrogance exceeds intelligence, you’ve got trouble. *Arrogance not only leads to blind spots, it also leads to blindness.*

At the extreme, arrogance feeds on a belief that a person is immune to any consequences. Arrogance erodes effectiveness in leaders by creating a perception that normal rules don’t apply to them. They can bend the rules. Eventually, they see themselves living by a different set of standards.

Once-effective people become increasingly out of touch and become less effective. Arrogance blocks out any room for growth. As Croft Pentz⁵ says, “A conceited person never gets anywhere because he thinks he is already there.”

John Ng, *Ph.D*
President
Meta

Tel: (65) 6419 5255
Fax: (65) 6227 7170
Email: john@meta.com.sg

Copyright © Meta Pte Ltd

For past articles on MetaTrends, please log in www.meta.com.sg

Learn the art of ***How to Communicate “Bad News” Effectively.***

Leadership Success and Feedback. As leaders, how open are we to feedback? Read this to find out how successful leaders receive and deal with feedback

The Leaders’ Role in Engagement. Find out to reengage and motivate your staff.

¹ Finkelstein, S. 2003. *Why Smart Executives Fail*. Penguin Group. New York, USA.

² McCall, M. 1998. *High Flyers. Developing the Next Generation of Leaders*. Harvard Business School Press. Boston, Massachusetts, USA.

³ McCall, M. 1998. *High Flyers. Developing the Next Generation of Leaders*. Harvard Business School Press. Boston, Massachusetts, USA.

⁴ McCall, M. 1998. *High Flyers. Developing the Next Generation of Leaders*. Harvard Business School Press. Boston, Massachusetts, USA.

⁵ Pentz, C.M. 2001. *1001 Things Your Mother Told You (and you should have listened to!)*. Tyndale House Publishers Inc., Wheaton, Illinois. USA.