

Management Challenges: How to Achieve Your Goals in Life and Work:

Introduction

More and more people in the workforce—and most knowledge workers—will have to MANAGE THEMSELVES. They will have to place themselves where they can make the greatest contribution; they will have to learn to develop themselves. They will have to learn to stay young and mentally alive during a fifty-year working life. They will have to learn how and when to change what they do, how they do it and when they do it.

Knowledge workers are likely to outlive their employing organization. Now even people of modest endowments, that is average mediocrities, will have to learn to manage themselves **and in order to succeed at your work, you must ask:**

What Are My Strengths?

Most people think they know what they are good at. They are usually wrong. People know what they are *not* good at more often—and even there people are more often wrong than right. And yet, one can only perform with one's strengths. One cannot build performance on weaknesses, let alone on something one cannot do at all.

For the great majority of people, to know their strengths was irrelevant only a few decades ago. One was born into a job and into a line of work. The peasant's son became a peasant. If he was not good at being a peasant, he failed. The artisan's son was similarly going to be an artisan, and so on. But now people have choices. They therefore have to know their strengths so that they can know where they belong.

There is only one way to find out: *The Feedback Analysis*. Whenever one makes a key decision, and whenever one does a key action, one writes down what one expects will happen. And nine months or twelve months later one then feeds back from results to expectations. I have been doing this for some fifteen to twenty years now. And every time I do it I am surprised. And so is everyone who has ever done this.

This is by no means a new method. It was invented sometime in the 14th century, by an otherwise totally obscure German theologian. Some 150 years later Jean Calvin in Geneva (1509-1564), father of Calvinism, and Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556), the founder of the Jesuit Order, quite independent of each other, picked up the idea and incorporated it into their rules for every member of their groups, that is, for the Calvinist pastor and the Jesuit priest. This explains why these two new institutions (both founded in the same year, in 1536) had come within thirty years to dominate Europe: Calvinism the Protestant north; the Jesuit Order the Catholic south.

Within a fairly short period of time, maybe two or three years, this simple procedure will tell people first where their strengths are—and this is probably the most important thing to know

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about oneself. It will show them what they do or fail to do that deprives them of the full yield from their strengths. It will show them where they are not particularly competent. And it will finally show them where they have no strengths and cannot perform.

Several *action conclusions* follow from the feedback analysis. The first, and most important, conclusion: *Concentrate on your strengths*. Place yourself where your strengths can produce performance and results. Second: Work on improving your strengths. The feedback analysis rapidly shows where a person needs to improve skills or has to acquire new knowledge. It will show where skills and knowledge are no longer adequate and have to be updated. It will also show the gaps in one's knowledge.

Of particular importance is the third conclusion: the feedback analysis soon identifies the areas where intellectual arrogance causes *disabling ignorance*. Far too many people—and especially people with high knowledge in one area—are contemptuous of knowledge in other areas or believe that being “bright” is a substitute for knowing. And then the feedback analysis soon shows that a main reason for poor performance is the result of simply not knowing enough, or the result of being contemptuous of knowledge outside one's own specialty.

For example, First-rate engineers tend to take pride in not knowing anything about people—human beings are much too disorderly for the good engineering mind. And accountants, too, tend to think it unnecessary to know about people. Human Resources people, by contrast, often pride themselves of their ignorance of elementary accounting or of quantitative methods altogether. Brilliant executives who are being posted abroad often believe that business skill is sufficient, and dismiss learning about the history, the arts, the cultures, the traditions of the country where they are not expected to perform—only to find that their brilliant business skills produce no results.

One important action conclusion from the feedback analysis is thus to overcome intellectual arrogance and work on acquiring the skills and knowledge needed to make one's strengths fully productive.

An equally important action conclusion is to remedy one's *bad habits*—things one does or fails to do that inhibit effectiveness and performance. They quickly show up in the feedback analysis.

The next action conclusion from the feedback analysis is what *not* to do. Feeding back from results to expectations soon shows where a person should not try to do anything at all. It shows the areas in which a person lacks the minimum endowment needed—and there are always many such areas for any person. And in these areas a person—and especially a knowledge worker—should not take on work, jobs, or assignments.

The fourth action conclusion is to waste as little effort as possible on improving areas of low competence. Concentration should be on areas of high competence and high skill. It takes far more energy and far more work to improve from incompetence to low mediocrity than it takes to improve from first-rate performance to excellence.

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The analysis may show that a person fails to obtain results because he or she lacks *manners*. Bright people—especially bright young people—often do not understand that manners are the “lubricating oil” of an organization. It is a Law of Nature that two moving bodies in contact with each other create friction. Two human beings in contact with each other therefore always create friction. And then manners are the lubricating oil that enables these two moving bodies to work together, whether they like each other or not—simple things like saying “please” and “thank you” and knowing a person’s birthday or name, and remembering to ask after the person’s family. If the analysis shows that brilliant work fails again and again as soon as it requires cooperation by others, it probably indicates a lack of courtesy, that is, of manners.

Finally, the analysis may also show, for instance, that a planner’s beautiful plans die because he or she does not follow through.

Please answer the following questions where indicated:

1. Who Am I? What Are My Strengths? HOW Do I Work?

2. Where Do I Belong?

3. What is My Contribution?

4. Give an Example of How you Take Relationship Responsibility.

5. What is your Plan for the Second Half of your Life?

6. Other Comments, Questions, or Goals?

7. What Help do you Need From your Supervisor to Achieve your Goals?

For more information please refer to Management Challenges for the 21st Century (1999) written by Peter F. Drucker.