



SPECIAL FEATURE: 'Discovering Me':

Will the Skills that got me here, get me where I want to go?

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AS THE DOORS of 2012 open taking us into a new and as ever uncertain time, here's an invitation for a new year's resolution – to allow yourself more (if not some) time to consider 'Project Me'. A project we seem to have less and less time to commit to in our busy corporate lives and yet if we don't, who else will? Let's for instance consider the question 'will the skills and attributes that got me the role I have today, be the skills and attributes that will enable me to succeed in my next role?' I suppose what I'm referring to predominantly is 'how well do I know myself'. Many of us can reach a point in our careers where we think we know ourselves well only to find that other's take a different view and this can happen quite suddenly, often when we reach a crucial point on the career ladder. The reason being that other's expectations of us change as we move into more influential roles. This may seem obvious. However, for many it is quite derailing when some of the core attitudes and behaviours that got us to a point of success can now need adapting because they can at best seem arrogant and at least immature. A subtle shift in maturity is usually what is requested by sponsors of Coaching programmes and this can quite often require getting to know aspects of ourselves that we have not yet learnt to nurture.

Let's be honest, how much time have we actually dedicated to developing personally over the past year? It is often the first thing to be put on the back burner when times are busy and yet paradoxically, developing personally can be exactly what is needed to ease some of the pressure professionally. Focusing on the softer skills of effective communication, influencing, negotiating,

interacting at different levels internally and externally, managing people, managing the complex interrelations within matrix teams and the conflict that they can create will not only develop core essential skills within industry (and life) they will also stand us in good stead for coping with other challenges 'being the Medic' in a team can bring (as I'm sure you are familiar with).

Many pharmaceutical physicians have shared with me over the years how this responsibility can be a double edged sword:-

- "People feel intimidated by me"
- "I get frustrated and am less tolerant because people don't pick things up as quickly as I do"
- "People expect me to be able to just fly with this because of my medical background and yet there's a whole political world out there that I've not yet got to grips with"
- "I don't understand why people believe so much in me – I'm just doing what I need to do – it's not that brilliant!"
- "I can't seem to get people to do what it is I want them to do – they just won't listen!"
- "I know why a trial should be done that way – why do we need to debate it?!"
- "I've been promoted and people are expecting me to be one of the gang and I want to be and yet I now know I can't be"



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Being able to overcome these types of challenges, means we have to be able to overcome some of the internal barriers we may be putting upon ourselves whilst accepting the external aspects that we cannot change. This element of personal growth cannot always be identified or learnt on a training skills course because it can be different for each individual. It requires a blend of interventions: Training, from which we can learn the basic skills and Coaching/Mentoring during which time we allow a trusted professional to put a metaphorical mirror up for us to see how other's may perceive us. This in turn broadens our self awareness and knowledge to give us greater choice in a given situation. The next stage of development is to be able to do this ourselves.

Anecdotal evidence acquired over many years in the arena of Executive Coaching has identified for me, four core attributes that in their truest sense often get overlooked. This is further supported by research and the literature promoting the ever increasing need for emotionally intelligent leadership and project management. They are:-

- Embracing Difference

- Effective Communication
- Resilience (particularly living with uncertainty)
- Authenticity

These four are intrinsically linked and underpinned by the need to better know and develop ourselves as demonstrated in the 'Discovering Me' Model in *Figure 1*. In general, those ready to explore these attributes or who have naturally developed in these areas bring something additional to the team, organisation and themselves that is not only welcomed, but leads to fundamental success and greater satisfaction at work and home. They cannot be simply learnt. They have to be explored on a personal level and quite often practised as part of an ongoing discipline.

In defining these attributes more specifically, to be able to 'Embrace Difference' we have to at the very least, increase our tolerance levels and appreciate the value variety can bring rather than use 'difference' as an excuse for ineffective relationships or delays. Even the word 'variety' offers another perspective. When we embrace 'difference' we give ourselves a greater opportunity for learning and growth.

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Sometimes our greatest teachers in life are the people we find most difficult to get along with because our perception is that 'they are so different to me'. Are they? Or are they highlighting traits that we might be refusing to recognise in ourselves? Traits we are judging as right or wrong rather than simply accepting for what they are and how they are affecting us. If we take time to reflect on what the emotion is that this difference is triggering in us, we can consider what this may be telling us about ourselves and whether the emotion is helpful or limiting. The idea being that we can in fact choose our emotions rather than letting them control us. This alone can fundamentally enhance our abilities - what ever stage in our career we are at.

There are some reliable and validated Psychometric tools and techniques that can also help us understand personality differences, why they occur and how they tend to be expressed. These can provide great insights when administered by a qualified facilitator. They can increase not only our levels of tolerance but also our ability to communicate more effectively.

| FIGURE 1: 'Discovering Me' Model



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Effective Communication as another core attribute requires much more than simply training in Assertiveness, Influencing, Negotiating, Conflict Management etc, it requires a real sense of who we are and what honestly gets in the way for us if we are to be truly skilled in what is a highly complex activity that we all participate in – sometimes more carefully than others. We cannot not communicate! Whether we are speaking or not, we are sending out some form of message. How conscious are we of these messages and the impact they can have on those around us? More importantly, how aware are we of the messages we send ourselves? For example, let's consider the reasons for our ability to be assertive in certain situations whilst seemingly totally incapable at other times. How does our own fear, cynicism or judgement affect our communication? How willing are we to admit to ourselves the part we are playing in the success or failure of a relationship or interaction because of our attitude, belief system, inflexibility, the language or tone being used or what we may not be saying? In balance, how aware are we of what works? What are we thinking, feeling and what is our behaviour when our communications are highly effective? Knowing our own winning formula and how that can be adapted depending upon where and who we are communicating with, we can choose to use it.

Another fundamental attribute is Resilience or the 'power of recovery'. It has become a 'buzz' word and not surprisingly considering what the majority of people have been facing over recent years. Resilience helps us manage ourselves when pressure is building to the point of stress. Living with uncertainty is one of the most common triggers of stress today and yet paradoxically, there is nothing more certain than uncertainty! If we can find a way of building our resilience and those of others in times of change, we are demonstrating an essential skill that

draws people to us. There are a number of techniques that can be employed to develop our resilience both practically and complementary:-

- Workshops and Coaching
- Self Help Books
- Meditation, Aromatherapy, Reiki etc
- Tai Chi or Yoga
- Building our SQ (spiritual intelligence) as well as our IQ and EQ (Emotional intelligence)

Being aware of our limitations, our drivers, our passion, what gives us energy and what saps it, can help us proactively manage pressure. Being mindful of the signals we do in fact give ourselves physically, emotionally, behaviourally if we take the time to notice them. Research has shown that similar neuronal cells found in the brain have been found in the cardiovascular sack as well as the gut. Is that gut response or increased heart rate more intelligent than we give it credit for? Resilient people have learnt to listen to their bodies, the signals it provides and respond before the real stress kicks in.

As with each of these categories, a focus on developing our awareness of ourselves and even observing our awareness (developing a level of meta-awareness) is essential. It is a discipline, a way of being that we can define for ourselves and in so doing; we can define our 'Authenticity'. By being authentic I am referring to completely accepting ourselves as we are – and here's the challenge we face. To achieve this, we have to fully accept our fallibility, our failures, learn from them rather than judge ourselves or others by them. We need to find a way of letting go of the need to defend or justify. Being authentic means we are confident in gathering the information we need to take tough decisions, accepting the consequences, sure in the knowledge that we acted in a way that

is true to ourselves and the greater good of the team, organisation etc. and can stand by that. When we are willing to take such accountability with a balanced measure of compassion and empathy, we build self confidence whilst engaging with and breeding authenticity in others.

These attributes and skills are complex. They are not something we learn one day and think we'll remember the next. People who are truly authentic and effective in these areas give time to regular practise, staying aware of what they are observing in themselves in order to remain self informed. With a healthy level of self acceptance and focus on self development we all have the opportunity to choose this form of personal development. It brings us greater choice and freedom in how we

think, the attitude we take towards other people and situations and our emotional responses. By default we enable enhanced qualities in what ever role we are performing whether it is now or in preparation for that ever important next move. So let's reconsider that New Year's Resolution around 'Project Me' and enjoy continued success in 2012!

For more information on any aspects of this article or how Coaching can enable development in these areas contact Alison Dixon (formerly Griffiths) at a.dixon@success-d.co.uk or go to www.success-d.co.uk or call for a confidential discussion on 07976 226828.



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