

Recruiting To Your Weakness

By Markku Kauppinen

Recently I was working with a consulting firm that utilizes the information we provide to help their clients with strategy implementation. This particular client company had a very common problem that we see in organizations in all kinds of industries. It seems that almost no one is immune to it. Their managers were cloning themselves.

They were hiring people that very closely mirrored who they are – people that seemed to have “that certain something”. They were bringing in people who made the hiring managers say: “You know, there was really something about that guy that made me feel very comfortable. He would fit very well in our team.”

I can still vividly remember the conversation I had with one manager eight years ago. He told me with a lot of enthusiasm and conviction: “I know exactly what I need to do. I need to clone myself. Then all of my worries will be gone!” He was a manager of about 45 account executives at a financial services organization. While his group was doing modestly well, no one attributed any of the credit to him. It was a classic case of doing well in despite of oneself.

Have you ever been in a situation when you had a hard time finding the right words to tell someone politely that they were dead wrong? I am pretty comfortable doing it now. Eight years ago I was not so comfortable. I remember saying to myself: “Clone you! Why do you think I am here?”

Since that moment, I have heard the same idea countless times. Actually, on the surface it makes a lot of sense. If I am successful as a manager, or at the very least think I am, why not duplicate myself and multiply the success. (By the way, I have not met many managers who

said they were not good managers – have you? I think there must be a few of them out there. At least the employees sometimes claim they are out there.) This plan sounds logical, simple and straightforward. Why not go for it?

And many do. They bring people into their team who in essence are mirror images. They act and think just like the boss. Conflicts happen less often, everyone gets along and life is smooth sailing.

Unfortunately, it is not all smooth sailing. Although typically a team with similar style employees tends to increase their strengths, they also *amplify their weaknesses*. What’s worse, they typically are completely oblivious to the latter. No one wants to face this fact. And the ones that do realize it often find it to be a lot more comfortable to be quiet. Who wants to rock the proverbial boat and to tell the boss they are doing it wrong?

The same happens in people’s personal lives. However, it seems that we are more aware of it then. We are more aware that when we are very much alike the amplification of strengths and weaknesses takes place. For example, take a couple of analytical people. They usually are aware that they have a hard time making decisions quickly and can even poke fun at themselves.

But at work, it is different. The problem is ignored and no humor is found in the situation. What often compounds the problem is that certain kinds of careers, jobs and even organizations tend to attract similar styles of employees. For example, the engineering field attracts more analytical styles than sales careers that often pull in more people-oriented styles. Combine this with a manager who clones him/herself and you end up with a team of clones.

“Markku, what is the best behavioral style for a leader (or manager, salesperson, etc.)?” This is a

question I get asked frequently – almost every day. My honest answer always is: “It depends on what you need. Do you know what you need?” Because the truth is that there is no one best behavioral style. There really is not, although I at times think mine is pretty good. Then I take another honest look.

But there is a common denominator with all successful people. They know who they are and they are honest with themselves. They are not afraid to look into the mirror and face the truth about their strengths, weaknesses and challenges. What’s more, they capitalize on their strengths, and they recruit to their weakness. They actually surround themselves with people who are different from their own style.

Why would anyone want to do this? Aren’t they inviting disagreements, conflicts and misery?

Maybe. But what they are also doing is recruiting additional strengths, different viewpoints, and different talents to their team. Please understand, I am not advocating that every team should be equally balanced with the different behavioral styles. That is rarely the best case. However, the most effective teams closely match the behavioral requirements that the mission of the team dictate. When the behavioral styles are closely aligned with the behavioral requirements, the team succeeds.

In sports everyone seems to understand this clearly. Many of us have our favorite players. We may have our favorite quarterback, pitcher, or center. But let me ask you this. Would you want your favorite sports team to be clones of that one player? Of course not! Your team would never have a chance to succeed even though someone cloned a superstar.

Next time you see a manager clone trying to clone him/herself, you may want to ask the same question. Do you really want to clone yourself or do you want to succeed?

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Give Yourself A Chance

By Marshall Goldsmith

"I am a terrible listener. I've been told that for years. People at work tell me I'm a bad listener. So does my wife. I guess that's just the way I am."

It's amazing how often I hear otherwise brilliant leaders make counterproductive, stereotypical comments about themselves.

The good news is that almost all the leaders I meet have quit making stereotypical comments about race, sex, or ethnic origin. The bad news is that we still make these self-limiting comments about ourselves.

You've surely heard them. Maybe you've used them to describe yourself:

- "I'm impatient!"
- "I'm always behind."
- "I always put things off!"

We often talk about ourselves as if we have permanent genetic flaws that can never be altered.

Our personal stereotyping may originate from stories about us that have been repeated for years--often from as far back as childhood. These stories may have no basis in fact. But they can set low expectations that produce self-fulfilling prophecies, which seem to prove that our negative expectations were correct.

I'm a good example of this. I was brought up in a small town. Growing up in Valley Station, Kentucky, I might naturally have become involved in cars, tools, and mechanical things. My dad had a two-pump gas station. Many of my friends liked to work on cars and race them at the drag strip.

As a child, however, I gained a different set of expectations from my mom. Almost from birth, I was told, "Marshall, you are extremely smart. In fact, you are the smartest little boy in Valley Station." She told me that I wasn't just going to go to college--I could go to graduate school! She also said, "Marshall, you have no mechanical skills, and you will never have any mechanical skills for the rest of your life!" (I don't think she wanted me to pump gas and change tires at the service station.)

How did these expectations affect my development? I was never encouraged to work on cars or be around tools. (As a teenager in the 1960s, I thought a universal joint was something that hippies smoked.) Not only did my parents know that I had no mechanical skills, my friends knew it. When I was 18 years old, I took the U.S. Army's Mechanical Aptitude Test. My scores were in the bottom second percentile of the entire nation. In other words, I was soundly defeated by random chance.

Six years later, however, I was at UCLA, working on my PhD. One of my professors, Bob Tannenbaum, asked me to write down things I did well and things I couldn't do. On the positive side, I jotted down, "research," "writing," "analysis," and "speaking." (In other words, I wrote, "I am smart.") On the negative side, I wrote, "I have no mechanical skills. I will never have any mechanical skills."

Bob asked me how I knew I had no mechanical skills. I explained my life history and told him

about my dismal showing on the Army test. "How are your mathematical skills?" he asked. I proudly replied that I had scored a perfect 800 on the SAT math 1 achievement test. Bob then asked, "Why is it that you can solve complex mathematical problems, but you can't solve simple mechanical problems?" Then he asked, "How is your hand-eye coordination?" I said that I was good at pinball and had helped pay for my college expenses by shooting pool, so I guessed that it was fine. Bob asked, "Why is it that you can shoot pool, but you can't hammer nails?"

Suddenly, I realized that I did not suffer from some sort of genetic defect. I was just living out expectations that I had chosen to believe. At that point, it wasn't just my family and friends who had been reinforcing my belief that I was mechanically hopeless. And it wasn't just the Army test, either. I was the one who kept telling myself, "You can't do this!" I realized that as long as I kept saying that, it was going to remain true.

The next time you hear yourself say, "I'm just no good at . . ." ask yourself why not. The next time you're coaching someone, and he or she says, "I'm just no good at . . ." ask them why not.

If we don't treat ourselves--and the people around us--as if we have incurable genetic defects, we can get better at almost anything we choose. Why not?

Dr. Marshall Goldsmith has recently been named by the American Management Association as one of 50 great thinkers and business leaders who have impacted the field of management. His 18 books include the Business Week best-seller, *The Leader of the Future* and *Global Leadership: The Next Generation*. Marshall is a world authority in helping successful leaders achieve positive change in behavior: for themselves, their people and their teams.