

Achieving the LOOK & SOUND of LEADERSHIP



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EXECUTIVE COACHING TIPS

Managing Your Strengths ▶ 11/02/05

- ▶ A Ph.D. scientist was given the leadership of a global research team. He'd built his career on his superior intellect and he rightly saw this assignment as a reward for his many scientific contributions. Within a year he was removed from the position because he'd damaged so many relationships with people on his team.
- ▶ A highly ethical young man worked for a humble leader. The leader's humility appealed to the young man so much that he consciously developed the attribute in himself. Later, having achieved the position of division president, his CEO told him he didn't inspire confidence or appear presidential.
- ▶ A rising star in a corporate communications department prided herself on her verbal acuity and ability to think on her feet. Her gifts allowed her to make presentations without preparation or rehearsal. In her performance review she was told that people experienced her as glib and intellectually lightweight.

All true stories. In each case, successful people came close to derailing their careers because they overdeveloped their strengths to the point where those strengths became liabilities.

Stop Sabotaging Your Career, a wonderfully practical book by Dr. Lois Frankel, addresses this very issue. "The common thread for people who derail," she writes, "is that they exhibit superior skill in a particular area to the exclusion of developing complementary ones." Even when their jobs demand that they display new skills, they "turn up the volume on those behaviors they already do well, hoping that doing more of the same will save them."

Of course it doesn't save them.

Any strength can become a liability. Are you a collaborative leader, encouraging feedback and seeking consensus? Terrific. But are you also sometimes slow to make decisions? Or vice versa—are you a fast-acting leader who charges ahead assuming your team will follow? And does your team sometimes get so tired of seeing your backside they simply sit down and let you go forward alone?



You get the point: the strength that helped you achieve your current success won't get you your NEXT success. You must develop complementary skills.

It's important to grasp the concept of being complementary. Imagine your left hand raised above your head, cupped as if cradling a precious ball. That's your strength. It's so far above average it shines like a beacon.

Now imagine your right hand cupping another ball down near your waist. That's your complementary skill set. It's still emerging. It's never going to get as high as your strength. It's not supposed to. That's not who you are.

What's important to understand is that as those new skills grow and creep higher, your left hand *stays up where it is*. This is not a set of scales balanced against each other. No, your left hand never declines; your right hand develops and matures as an independent complement. That's how you become a truly powerful player. But without a new set of skills, that next career step may stay out of reach.

When I propose this idea, people ask, "But how will I know what I need to develop?"

The answer is feedback. Tips about feedback and awareness are:

[*Getting Good Feedback*](#)

[*Self-Knowledge as Leadership*](#)

[*Playback as Feedback*](#)

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