

ON MANAGEMENT

Enhancing Executive Effectiveness



By Carl Robinson, Ph.D.

Carl Robinson, Ph.D., is a business psychologist and executive coach in Seattle who focuses on the development of high performance leaders. Dr. Robinson has over 20 years experience using research-based, proven-in-the-trenches, motivational and performance enhancement technologies to help individuals and organizations improve their effectiveness.



It's a commonly held but mistaken belief that the best way to grow as an executive or business person is to "develop" your weaker attributes or "weaknesses."

The latest research on leadership effectiveness, however, validates what most of us who coach executives know from working in the trenches, that if you focus too much of your time on developing weakness you will be wasting your time. It's much more effective to parlay your strengths while avoiding or, if necessary, correcting "five fatal flaws." These flaws include:

1. *Inability to learn from mistakes*
2. *Lack of core interpersonal skills and competencies*
3. *Lack of openness to new or different ideas*
4. *Lack of accountability and excessive defensiveness*
5. *Lack of initiative*

Jack Zenger and Joe Folkman, who researched and wrote *The Extraordinary Leader*, analyzed data from 25,000 managers who participated in 360-degree (multi-rater) feedback performance

assessments and then compared the results to their actual performance. They discovered that the top 20 percent of achievers were rated high (4.5 and above on a 5 point scale) on three of 16 different behaviors/skills that comprised the five competency clusters indicated in figure 1.

Yes, you read it right, executives who excel in just three different behaviors/skills within these key competency clusters are perceived by others as extraordinary leaders and are more likely to achieve great results. What does that mean?

You don't have to be great at everything to be extraordinary!

One very important conclusion they came to from their research is that "...getting a little bit better at things that you are average at or bad at isn't going to do anything." There isn't much lift associated with working on your average or below average skills. It isn't going to change your performance enough to push you up to the level where you will be considered

"exceptional or strong" in the eyes of others (your raters). The better tactic is to focus on the things that you are somewhat good at and passionate about. You are more likely to get better at those competencies, and raising those up will really make a big difference.

For example, a CEO founder of a middle market technology company, who was an executive coaching client of mine, understood that he was very good at "leading change" but not so hot at the nuts and bolts follow-through (driving for results). Not

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uncommon for entrepreneurs. By concentrating his time and energy in the "leading change" group of competencies and hiring a top



(figure 1)

flight COO who was talented at getting people to get things done, his company achieved better results and he was rated highly as a leader. His company was better served. The most competent people were handling what they do best and everyone won. What is fascinating about the five fatal flaws is that these traits reflect a pattern of inactivity. It is not the pattern of someone who is doing too much of something, but the pattern of someone doing way too little.

Excessive defensiveness (lack of accountability) and having poor interpersonal skills are the most frequently cited issues that cause executives to be referred to executive coaches. And, of those, excessive defensiveness is the most difficult to turn around. Interestingly, such executives frequently come across as super-confident when in fact they are really insecure. Their fatal flaw makes it impossible for them to ask for help, much less admit they need it. Whereas people with poor interpersonal skills often want to learn and can become more adept if they work hard at it.

So, if you want to excel as a leader, be courageous and get an honest and objective assessment of your capabilities. Then, to be sure that your career is on a trajectory for success, fix any fatal flaws and do more of what you're both passionate about and do well. &

Competency Clusters:

1. **Character:** integrity, honesty, doing what you say you are going to do, and predictability.
2. **Personal competence:** problem solving skills, technical proficiency, and being receptive to new ideas.
3. **Driving for results:** setting lofty goals, having a clear view of what needs to be accomplished, being very focused on that and taking responsibility to achieve those goals.
4. **Interpersonal competency:** inspiring and motivating other people. It means being perceived as a good team player. It is being a prolific and powerful communicator.
5. **Leading Change:** "having a vision of the future, having your antenna out to look at what is going on in the outside world."