

Growing as a consulting leader

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Excerpt from a speech on 'growing in leadership' presented to an international consulting firm

What is leadership?

Leadership textbooks will tell you that leadership requires an ability to establish purpose and vision, to inspire others and to influence positive change.

One of my favorite leadership quotes is: "If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, then you are a leader." John Quincy Adams, 6th president of the US, 1825-1829.

To grow as a leader you need to work on developing your skills and behaviors. I'd like to discuss three areas of development that I believe are important:

- Accountability
- Creativity
- Self-Awareness

Accountability

A career in consulting provides a high degree of independence – and accountability. You decide which sector and service to focus on. You decide which account teams and clients to invest in – and, ultimately, which partners to work with. Whether you get on assignment, develop thought leadership or sell work – is ultimately down to you.

You also need to show responsibility to others, including members of your line team, account team and client assignment team.

One of the best examples of accountability I recall was by a CIO client who was going through a merger. He did not know if he would be part of the merged organization, but he made sure each of his direct reports had challenging roles in the new organization. He ultimately moved on as the role he was offered wasn't right for him, but he demonstrated a high level of accountability for his team.

Creativity

Consulting is not a 'cookie cutter' business.

You need to demonstrate strong consulting and relationship skills, a service or sector specialism, and offer industry or service insights.

You are challenged to come up with better, more valuable ideas for solving your clients' business problems.

Creativity and the ability to adapt and innovate is a key leadership characteristic.

In his book, *The Element*, Sir Ken Robinson, the international speaker on innovation, defines creativity as "the process of having original ideas that have value." (Robinson, 2009, P69). He highlights that in all creative work there will be problems, dead ends and frustrations – but also a deep sense of satisfaction once you have something new that will work. The key is not stopping with ideas but evaluating them and turning the best of them into something of business value.

Working in teams can help generate and evaluate multiple ideas, and bring different skills and experiences which will help the creative process. I use a music example to illustrate this:

Many of you will have heard of Miles Davis, the jazz trumpeter and composer. In 1959 he recorded 'Kind of blue' with a sextet that included pianist Bill Evans, drummer Jimmy Cobb and saxophonist John Coltrane. It arguably became one of the greatest jazz recordings of all time. These talented professionals came together and exchanged ideas, looking to take risks and break new ground in an environment of trust and mutual respect.

If we can gather our best people together under similar conditions, perhaps we can create new or augmented services of high value.

Self-awareness

Do you know what you are good at, are known for? Are you building your leadership platform based on your strengths? For example: are you a strategic thinker? An expert in a service or sector? A relationship builder? A strong executor or influencer?

Your talents will be different to your peers. It's important to recognize that it's 'ok to be you' and to develop a leadership 'brand' that complements and builds on your strengths.

Great leaders often excel in no more than one of two areas. However, they understand and leverage their strengths and build great teams comprising people who are strong in areas they are not.

Feedback from your clients, performance reviews and 360 degree feedbacks, as well as becoming more aware of what you excel at, can help you establish where you are strongest. This information can help guide your personal investment in leadership development.

Summary

Growing as a leader requires you to developing the behaviors and characteristics that will allow you to take on bigger challenges.

If you can develop a high-degree of accountability, creativity and a strong sense of self awareness you have the potential to achieve greater success in your careers and personal lives – and hopefully you will have a lot of fun doing it.

I'd like to finish off with a quote from Michelangelo "The greatest danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but that it is too low and we reach it".

Thank you and best of luck as you grow in leadership.

References:

Robinson, Ken., (contribution by Aronica, Lou.), 2009. "The Element. How finding your passion changes everything". Penguin Group.

http://thinkexist.com/quotation/if_your_actions_inspire_others_to_dream_more/339093.html

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