

The Tough Old Art Of Managing Self.



It may come as a surprise to you to hear a leadership consultant talking about management, but it really shouldn't. The terms "leadership" and "management" have been compared to each other and "management" has always taken a beating, been vilified and sidelined, as though "management" were inferior to "leadership". Nothing could be further from the truth! You need to remember that management is but a subset of leadership. Management is one of the competencies that a leader had better possess, just as a manager had better have great leadership qualities! In other words, management is one of the expressions, or one of the functions, of leadership.

You might also be surprised that I am talking about self management, when I could be discussing management skills as a whole. Of course, you cannot manage yourself well if you don't manage your relationships and other aspects of your life well, and vice versa. I focus on managing yourself here because some people have been asking me about, well, self-management. If you'd like a handle or two on how to manage yourself, read on.

There are two main obstacles to managing yourself well. They are low self-esteem and a misplaced sense of responsibility, or what is also known as false responsibility.

Low Self Esteem.

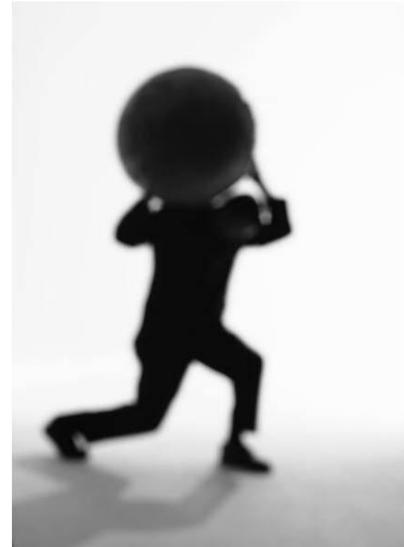
If you suffer from low self-esteem, the first thing to do is to recognize that you have no one but yourself to blame. Not your parents, your upbringing, social and economic status, your boss, your co-workers, people who report to you, or the society in which you happen to be living in now. Take responsibility and acknowledge that you are the one with the low self-esteem and that you can and should get off your pedestal of self-pity and start climbing to the next higher level of existence. Even if you are right about life in general not being fair to you, what can you do about those circumstances or those people? Right. Nothing. However, what can you do about yourself? Everything. The key is to recognize that it is your responsibility and act on that realization.

When you have low self-esteem, nothing seems out work out right for you. It is as though you had the keys to a Porsche but you can't drive. Or you have tickets for an all-expenses-paid dream vacation to Mars but won't enter the spacecraft because you are afraid of flying. People with low self-esteem suffer primarily from low self-efficacy. They lack certain competencies, don't have the knowledge and don't want to venture out in order to get those competencies. This is tragic, because low self-esteem is one of the easiest maladies to fix. All that is required is a willingness to step out and go get the competencies you need. If you can't afford to pay for courses, you can certainly get yourself better organized. You can get some exercise to become fitter, choose to eat wisely, have better sleep habits and groom yourself as best you can so that you become more acceptable to others who have to interact with you. There are many free courses on the internet that you can undergo. You do

need to be discerning in which courses you do take, but there are many that give you tips on how to manage your time, develop people skills and others. The information is out there. What is needed is the will to implement what information you gain. If you find it too tough to do by yourself, get someone to be your accountability partner, or get yourself a life coach. The choice is up to you, as you know your own circumstances best. You either make the best of what you have right now or you will be bested by all the things you bemoan not having.

False Responsibility.

One of the disadvantages of being a member of the “caring majority” is that you tend to take on responsibilities that are not yours to take. I do not mean that you should not take on additional responsibilities from time to time. Indeed, taking on additional responsibilities as appropriate will stretch you and help you grow. They are also opportunities for you to demonstrate clearly that you are ready for positions of higher authority. What I do mean is that you should clearly and firmly reject responsibilities, odd jobs, “secondary appointments” and about ten thousand other distractions that will disrupt your fulfillment of your primary job. You need to be very clear about what your primary job is, and you need to subtly remind people you report to what that primary job happens to be. When your job, or your role in the



company, was being scoped, whoever did the scoping had specific outcomes in mind, or should have had, and would have scoped the job being done well by one person on a normal eight-hour day basis. That is what you are being paid for. I am not suggesting that you be mercenary about it, but you have to be realistic and your boss has to be realistic, too. So, while you would of course remain very helpful, recognize that even good bosses are still human, and they might actually have overlooked the fact that they could have given you far too much for you to handle. You need to remind them about this when it happens. No need to be confrontational, a simple question like “If you need me to work on the Omega Seventeen Project and it’s due in two weeks, is there someone else who is going to take over the Alpha Twelve one from me?” Your boss could very well have forgotten that the Alpha Twelve project is ongoing and that he needs to do much more than just pile more work on your plate. If he insists that you take on the Omega Seventeen project anyway, then remind him about the business implications if the Alpha Twelve project were held up by two weeks and let him decide. Of course, if you have become so good at handling the Alpha Twelve project that you are spending most of the day twiddling your thumbs, then you ought to take on the Omega Seventeen project, recognizing that it is another step towards more promotion or recognition or both, but for most cases I doubt it. I was once asked to be part of a committee to review the continued relevance of a supporting business unit to the organization I was in. I was already up to my ears reorganizing the other five core business units and I didn’t need any more work shoved to me just because I was very capable of getting things done quickly and well. I went for the first meeting with my limbs, torso, head and

other parts of me bound with masking tape, as though that was what was holding me together. The bosses got the message, and I was pulled off that committee.

Then there are those co-workers who never seem to grow up, but are always coming to you for help with this, that or the other. You will help in whatever way you can, of course, being the nice, kindly soul that you are, but even you have your limits. If the co-worker seems bent on getting you to do his work for him, ask him if he needs to go for some skills training, and that you could recommend that to your mutual boss, or sit down and interview him to see if he really has some issues that he could use some help with. It doesn't have to take long, all you need is to go for lunch with him and you should be able to discern whether he needs help and how that help can be delivered. It does not necessarily have to come from you.¹ Be friendly, be open, and be firm. You will do neither yourself nor your play-the-helpless-victim co-worker any good if you continue to encourage him to behave the way he does. Your responsibility is to help him, not go down with him in his sinking ship.

Then there are those people reporting to you whom you wish would just go somewhere else and make someone else's life miserable. One of the most debilitating fears of having people reporting to you is the fear that, if you fire them for poor performance, they would have lost their livelihood. This is utterly ridiculous and serves no one. Not you, not your direct report, nor the organization you are working in. Help the person, by all means, but you are running a business, not a social welfare organization. In fact, even if you were running a social welfare organization, your basic adage ought to be that "whosoever will not work will not eat." Your job, when you have people reporting to you, is to grow them as much as you can. Equip them with skills, lead them well, send them for courses when you can, and most important, make sure you are developing yourself so that you can continue to be of help to them.

A false sense of responsibility coupled with not having the will to say "No" will utterly ruin your life. Make sure you know your roles and responsibilities well. They may change and grow as time passes, but you must be crystal clear as to what they are, and make sure that those you work with know them, too.

Manage Yourself Now!

Now that you have read this, what is one thing you can do now to manage yourself better? Do it! Find one other thing tomorrow and start doing that, too. After one week, do let me know how you have fared.

¹ If you would like to be equipped with coaching skills, contact me and I will discuss options with you.