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LIMITERS OF EXECUTIVE SUCCESS AND ADVANCEMENT

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INTRODUCTION By Brad Westveld, Partner, ON Partners

ON Partners and Sockwell Performance Advisors have a long and trusted partnership. The following thoughts, written by Allen Sockwell, Founder, could not be more true -- and echo much of what we at ON Partners interview against, look for, and gauge when we assess today's up-and-coming leaders. Allen's thoughts on item #1, "Self-Awareness" ring especially true! If you as a leader can act on one thing, learn how others react to you, view/think of you, and then with honest self-reflection use this to your advantage. Trust me, you will make better decisions, and your organization will follow. The limiters that Allen describes are substantive, but if addressed, can become something that sets you apart from the proverbial crowd.

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Over 35 years I have coached more than 1000 leaders across all levels of management. I have had the pleasure of watching exceptional professionals enjoy great career success. Sadly, I have watched other talented and motivated leaders fall short of their ultimate career potential. There are themes that emerged which explain much of this underachievement. In the hope that others might learn from my observations I have captured the 5 most common career limiters below. Pay particular attention to the first item, **Underdeveloped Self-Awareness**. If this list doesn't make you think about yourself, you might want to read the first item again.

1. Underdeveloped Self-Awareness

Lack of self-awareness is one of the greatest career derailers among emerging and high potential leaders. I continue to be surprised at how unaware leaders can be regarding how others experience them. This lack of understanding could impact how effectively direct reports are managed, might damage critical peer relationships and occasionally undermines engagement with the boss. These ineffective approaches are well intentioned. The consequences are simply not well understood. These blind spots can impact a leader's ability to execute

and build influence within the organization. In addition, this unawareness can limit perceived upward potential.

Coaching Tip: Get feedback!! Most companies can provide objective feedback though 360 assessments (done by an executive coach, company HR or using on-line tools), honest boss feedback and discussions with key business partners such as HR.

2. Undervaluing Lateral Relationships

Success early in a leadership career is based upon ability to manage a team, to drive execution downward. That changes as a leader moves upward into higher levels of management. Functional leaders and C-level executives must ensure that their organization plans and execution are linked well to other critical groups within the company. As a C-level leader one plays the dual role of leading a major corporate function AND acting as a key leader of the entire organization. This requires a higher level of skill in managing lateral relationships. The ability to influence a very talented and influential peer may be as important to success as managing the execution of a function. Many emerging leaders lack the understanding, skills and experience necessary to engage at this level. It is a world of very talented, driven, confident and sometimes challenging leaders .

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Coaching Tip: Invest time in building rapport, understanding the role/objectives and key dependencies of your key peers.

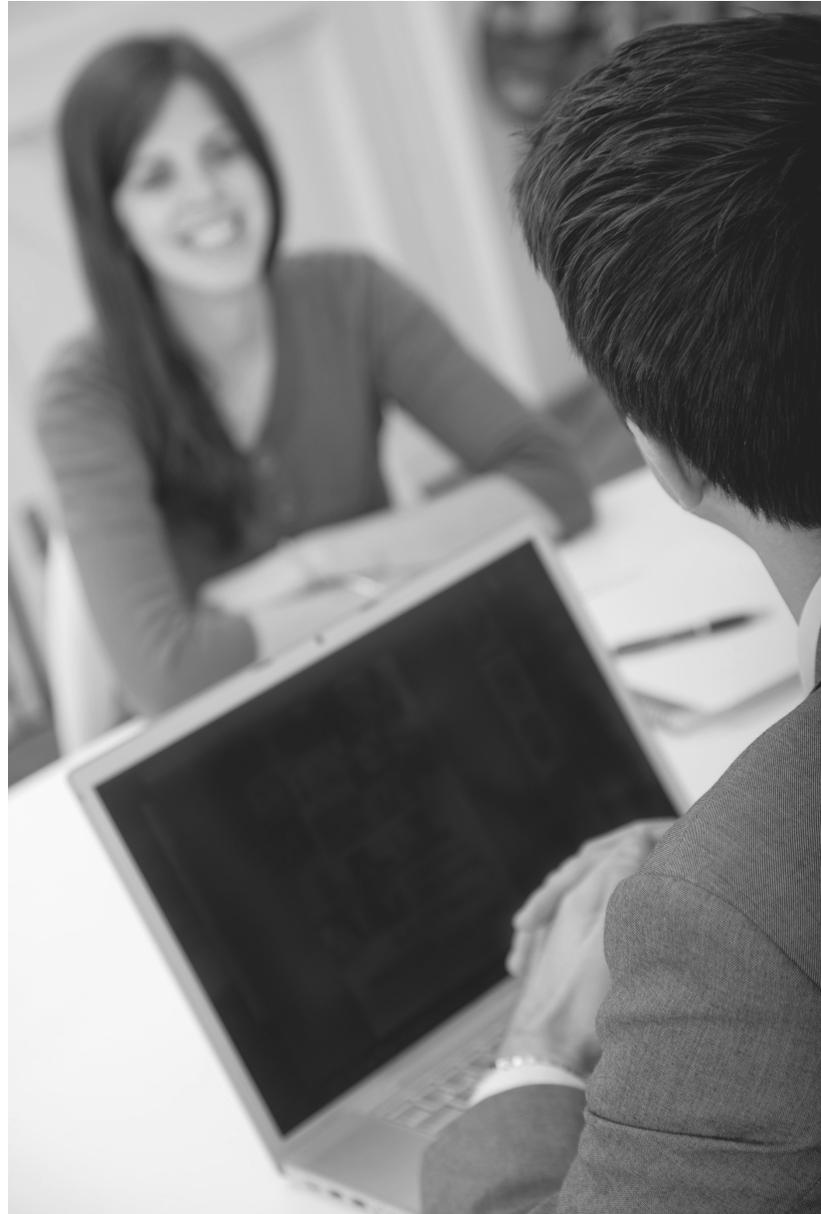
3. Ignoring Capability Gaps on Your Team

As I work with executives we frequently address gaps in capability in their direct reports. Often executives are being dragged into tactical operating issues due to these gaps. Missing skills, under performing executives or poor teamwork greatly impact the work of the executive. Too many leaders are unaware or unwilling to address these issues. Accepting the gaps, and the resulting impact on an executive's effectiveness as a leader, limits the team's contribution, ability to drive strategic imperatives, lateral alignment and growth in organization capacity. As a leader you have the team that you choose to have. A leader can accept the limits of the team and the impact they have on the role he/she can play. Or they can choose to address them. Each executive gets to decide.

Coaching Tip: Work with a trusted advisor to perform a critical assessment of your team. Where are the limitations and gaps which drag you down into work the team should be able to do? Build a plan to address individual gaps through training, coaching or talent acquisition.

4. Insufficient Feedback to Your Team

I have never met an employee that got too much helpful feedback from their direct manager. Employees, whether front line employees or executives, want more insight into what they do well and how they could be more effective in their role..



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Too many leaders rely on formal feedback processes run by HR as the vehicle for feedback. But good feedback and effective coaching are the processes by which employees and teams improve.

Communicating “here is how you are doing and how you could do better” on a project, in a meeting, with a customer... should be an ongoing part of a leaders daily dialog.

Coaching Tip: Provide weekly feedback to team members in two areas: What I appreciate about your contribution to the team. What you could do to be more effective.

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5. Inadequate Focus on Critical Team Objectives

Many leaders fail to understand why their teams can't remain focused on the most critical priorities. In the words of the Grinch "Oh the noise, noise, noise, noise, noise." We are bombarded by information and distractions. Technology has both increased the volume and accelerated our access to data. While at times helpful, this bombardment can have the effect of causing significant distraction and dilution of focus. A distracted team will be an under-performing team. Overcoming this distraction requires constant messaging to teams to cut through the noise and continue to reinforce critical priorities.

Coaching Tip: Use an advertising model. A clear and compelling message, delivered through the right/multiple channels, with enough frequency will result in the awareness and understanding your team needs to prioritize and execute.

Summary and How to Learn More

The risks described above are real. Many of my executive coaching engagements focus on these risk areas. They have and do limit the effectiveness and advancement of talented leaders. The good news is that they can be overcome with the right awareness and support. If you want to learn more about how an executive coaching partner can accelerate performance and the realization of career potential contact Allen at Allen@SockwellAdvisors.com



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