

TOP TEN LEADERSHIP BLIND SPOTS



PRESENTED BY |



ABOUT THE AUTHORS |

In 2007, Allen Sockwell and Brad Westveld began a professional relationship that expanded into a mutual friendship over the course of multiple search projects on behalf of AMD. It is through these shared experiences, not to mention a combined expertise of over 40 years consulting on organization development practices, that the two professionals have developed an uncommon viewpoint into the key elements of excellent and, in consequence, poor management approaches. Their collective insights into the raw materials of management success are presented here.

**ALLEN SOCKWELL
SOCKWELL PERFORMANCE ADVISORS |**

Allen R. Sockwell, President of Sockwell Performance Advisors, has advised boards and senior executives in public and private companies, through growth and restructuring, across industries and major global markets. His understanding of client strategy, business objectives and operating plans serves as the basis for consulting on the leadership capability and human capital required for enterprise success.

Allen has over 30 years of experience as an advisor and business partner to executive management, most recently as Senior Vice President and Chief Talent Officer at Advanced Micro Devices [NYSE:AMD]. Recently, he has founded his own enterprise performance consulting firm. Sockwell Performance Advisors specializes in enhancing enterprise value and profitability through improved leadership and effective management. He currently serves on the board of 3 early stage companies and consults with CEOs and senior executives across multiple industries.

**BRAD WESTVELD
ON SEARCH PARTNERS |**

As co-founder and partner at ON Search Partners, a leading global retained executive search firm, Brad Westveld specializes in the recruitment of C-level opportunities for public and emerging technology companies. He maintains a specific focus on the Electronics, Systems, Semiconductor and Cleantech marketplaces, actively working within industry hubs across the world. He is widely recognized for his interactive and engaged approach, assisting clients in navigating a search process that is dynamic, complex, and real time.

Brad has over 13 years of experience placing the top executive and board positions in major cleantech and technology companies. His consultative approach with venture capital and private equity backed portfolio companies, as well as his relationships with the visionary leaders in public companies such as AMD, LSI, and Silicon Labs, have afforded him a unique insight into the challenges and influences talent has upon the performance of an organization and how choosing the right talent at the right time can dramatically propel the success of a company in today's economy.

INTRODUCTION |

In an attempt to maintain distinction between speakers without disrupting the readers' experience, comments by the two authors are separated via the color blocking used here throughout the article.

BRAD WESTVELD |

After over 13 years of finding outstanding people for companies that want to stay on the sharpest edge of America's technology revolution, it is obvious to me that the difference between a good leader and a great one comes down to an ability to create opportunities and the skill to manage people in order to take advantage of them. It is a thin sliver of difference in actuality when you consider that it only takes small changes in the behavior or viewpoint of a manager to create amazing changes in a team's performance.

The 10 Blind Spots that Allen has outlined are at the very foundation of attitudes and actions that superb leaders practice every day. No matter your industry, the size of your company, or where you fall within in the hierarchy in it, excelling at never being blind to these issues will clearly make the difference between **average** and **great** in your career.

ALLEN SOCKWELL |

Over the last 30 years I have coached leaders at every level, across many companies, and in almost every part of the world. These people came from an incredibly diverse set of backgrounds, performed roles across all company functions and had a large variety of styles and worldviews.

Over time an interesting pattern began to emerge. Independent of culture, industry, company, or individual, the issues that leaders faced were the same. More importantly these leaders seemed to struggle with clearly identifying these areas of weakness or risk. I began to gather these common issues into a set of coaching principles I could use to discuss key management challenges during my individual coaching sessions or in management training courses that I taught. That outline became the basis of this list of the 10 areas that create significant risk to both personal and organizational success.

I think of them as Blind Spots, those unseen things that create danger that we don't react to until too late. In this paper, I hope to expose some of these areas of risk to help leaders question how they lead their organizations.

If you think these don't apply to you, I would suggest you think again. By definition, we are unaware of these Blind Spot issues in our organizations. I can't think of one leader, of one team, that hasn't had some of these issues degrading performance to some degree. I doubt that your team will be the first.

LEADERSHIP BLIND SPOT #1:

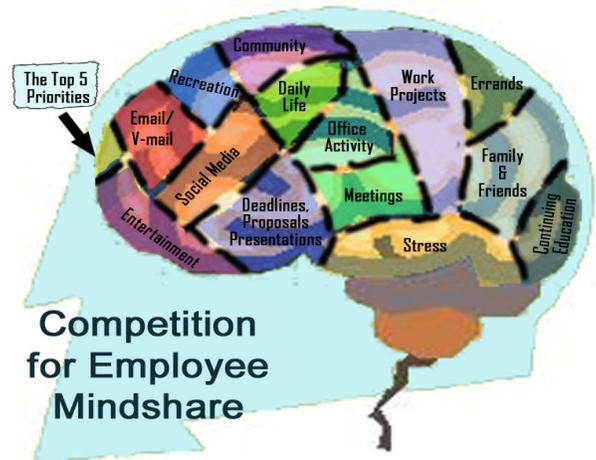
Under-communicating strategic direction and priorities

Under-communicating strategic direction and priorities is one of the most common mistakes I have seen leaders make. Executives typically have a set of top priorities or organizational goals they have defined and communicated. Usually, this communication takes the form of a PowerPoint presentation that is shared in executive staff meetings; then again in some form of employee communication process...an all-employee email or company-wide meetings. Some leaders even remind their organizations of these goals in quarterly communication meetings. But in our world of hyper-information availability and constant communication, this is not enough to maintain the focus needed to ensure success.

Competing inputs drastically dilute the focus leaders are trying to create. Think about the world we live in today. We are constantly bombarded with email, text messages, Tweets, web-based news, and information. Boards, customers, employees and other key stakeholders thrust new projects and pressing requirements on us...and these are just the distractions in the workplace. Add to this our lives and priorities outside of work. The impact of all of these is that our top priorities actually achieve very little mind-share against this other clutter.

Priorities are never as clear as we think!

The most effective leaders recognize this mind-share issue and have decided to dramatically increase their message volume and frequency to overcome the clutter. Think of this as an advertising campaign just like any other in your business. A clear and compelling message



is a good start, but insufficient. Next, you must define the channels and the frequency required for the message to be understood in order to have the impact you desire.

The way some effective leaders address this is by starting almost every discussion with a reminder of these top priorities. Every one-on-one, every staff meeting, every operating review, every employee meeting....you get the point. They say, "Remember our top 5 priorities are..... Now let's talk about our agenda today in light of those key areas of focus." And it works. You really have to hammer this home way beyond what feels necessary.

Priorities are never as clear as we think!

Cutting through the clutter is very difficult. But, allowing a continuous dilution of focus on your top goals will lead to continually degrading organizational performance.

LEADERSHIP BLIND SPOT #2:

Poorly communicating expectations

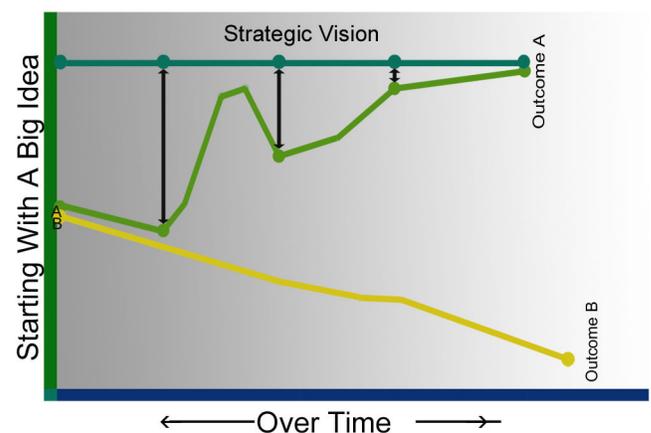
Another common blind spot is poorly defined success measures. Vague expectations are dangerous! Communicating top priorities creates the basis for areas of focus for an organization, team or individual. However, without clear definitions of success, management and employees can be aiming for very different levels of performance. This creates significant risk in execution to committed operating plans and strategic projects.

In addition, there is nothing that sucks energy out of a team or individual more than thinking they have met or exceeded key objectives only to be told that the expectations were much different. It is a bit like playing a game thinking you understand the rules, only to have someone explain at the end that winning is defined differently than you expect. That crushes a team.

Specific targets and timeframes clarify what achievement levels are expected. Leaders need to be very precise in defining how they are going to measure success. What indicators are going to be used? What weight will be put on different measures? And what are the specific target levels for each of those measures that are expected? (A personal career note to leaders: Never let others define what success looks like for you at the end of the game. Define it VERY clearly at the beginning, then all that is left is keeping score).

Highly visionary leaders struggle with this more than most. They tend to be heavy on pitching big ideas, but very light on communicating priority and specific expectations. The way I suggest dealing with this is by having the visionary leader and the catcher of the visioning walk through the following process:

1. Start with the big idea...what is the key concept AND how does it relate to the key strategic priorities of the organization.
2. Solidify and communicate 4-6 key defining principles, which provide further insight into the key elements or concepts the leader has in mind (but often doesn't explicitly communicate).
3. Have the vision catcher shape the goal/project. Develop explicit measures and targets that define success.
4. To prevent drift from the vision, managers need to establish a Short Feedback Loop Review, frequently rechecking the trajectory of projects and functions against the original direction. Only a few days of work should pass before a quick review to check for alignment, through to the achievement of the goal. This allows corrections to be driven in time to save time and money, gain improvement, and ensure proper project execution.



By ensuring a short duration of time between feedback loops, Effort A reaches the original Strategic Vision engendered by the Big Idea. Without any realignment against the Vision, Effort B's divergence grows exponentially.

LEADERSHIP BLIND SPOT #3:

Waiting for poor performance to improve — Hope is not a strategy

Managing under-performance is a critical skill for all organizational leaders. But, dealing effectively with low performers can be a difficult and time-consuming task. Too often, low performance goes unaddressed, leading to loss of management credibility and lower unit performance.

Leaders often hope performance improves. Hope is not a strategy. It is often denial disguised. Sometimes leaders simply don't see the performance issues. More often, they spot low performance based on missing key

Ultimately when you consider Blind Spots #1, #2 and #3...at a macro-level...it's what makes a leader!

Like it or not...when it comes time to do an executive search (and usually I am called to look for the replacement of someone not performing), the manager 'hoping' things will get better, is often the one getting replaced. From a performance viewpoint, Blind Spots #1, #2 and #3 tie into what defines an effective manager of people. ..the reason why an executive is hired, and ultimately fired. Size, scope, and visibility may change in individual management roles, but the failure to set a strategy, prioritize, and then communicate a vision throughout the organization are classic downfalls. The last nail in the coffin is then lack of decisiveness ...and hoping things will magically get better.

On a positive note, the leader who does in fact recognize and address these Blinds Spots will often see their organization emulate their actions. When this strategy is copied even 1 and 2 levels down, the results can be very powerful and have a direct correlation to the company's bottom-line.

milestones, low project quality, or ineffective people management. Often they are perplexed about what the root performance issues are and how to address them. This confusion turns into inaction, allowing the underperformance and resulting operational impacts to continue.

I coach leaders to use the diagnostic framework below to understand root causes of poor performance. Once these questions are answered, then targeted action can be taken.

These situations almost always get worse if left alone. They never get better on their own. Understanding the real issues and taking action quickly leads to faster improvement and reduces the risk of unrecoverable failure for your team members and yourself.

Does the employee understand what is expected?

Ensure there are clear goals and expectations outlined.

Is this something the employee has the capacity to do?

If not, then how big is the gap and how much time and effort to fix?
Can you afford the time and effort to close the gap?

Are they passionate about the work?

People gravitate to the work that they enjoy. Sustained success won't happen if the employee isn't passionate about the tasks being performed. Be wary here of attempting to change someone's natural inclination. Get people in the right roles.

Is the environment a fit for this employee?

You must evaluate if the employee can perform to expectations with the resources, support and environment that exist or that you can reasonably create.

NO ONE is irreplaceable.

I worked with a company who tolerated a terrible manager and team player. The employee was the key account executive for an important client and they made the numbers. Thus, the employee was believed to be irreplaceable by a number of senior executives. Their destructive behavior was tolerated for a long time.

The warning signs ... low team morale, high team turnover (including a new executive assistant every year), disparagement of upper management, and a tone in every communication that said “everyone else is stupid, but me” ... were visible, but tolerated. *Why?* Because management believed that they could not replace the production this person delivered. They thought this person had unique skills and relationships and tolerated the behavior as a price for getting results.

As a result, they chose to ignore the negative impacts created by this destructive person. For some reason, those behaviors are often seen as a reasonable price to pay to get results, but the drain on other organizations and individuals is always far greater than what management appreciates.

Finally, management addressed the situation. Not surprisingly, the company survived the loss of this “irreplaceable” employee and was better off when this person was gone.

In other situations, a uniquely skilled and valuable employee stands out on a team. They play a critical role in product design, marketing, sales, or other key functions. Management values this contribution tremendously. They are invaluable...and then they are gone. The company flounders, unprepared for the loss.

I would argue that in most cases, the “irreplaceable employee” is the most replaceable. Over the years as a search firm, we are often the ones asked to come behind and actually *replace* the so called “irreplaceable” icon. In the wake of this, what we mostly find can be amazing...a sense of relief and eerie calm inside the organization...almost a yearning for a fresh start.

Most of the time the behaviors described by Allen have included built up walls, poor management skills and training, and an inability for anyone in the organization to delegate, or take action, or feel any sense of empowerment. Once gone, almost instant healing begins. Our message is don't be afraid to make this change....we have seen organizations bounce back quickly and ultimately thrive in the very near-term.

You can address this problem two ways. One way is by never letting one person become that critical in the first place. Single points of failure create too much risk. Build breadth and depth around these people. Do it before you think you need to. The second way is more typical. We adjust role and structures, and go searching for a replacement. It's a very reactive solution to a problem we can address in advance.

I have never met the irreplaceable employee. I never will. In my career, I have worked with some incredible business people, outstanding leaders and innovative engineers. None of them was irreplaceable. Some of them did leave. However, organizations have an almost infinite capacity to adapt to the loss of a single person.

NO ONE is irreplaceable.

LEADERSHIP BLIND SPOT #5:

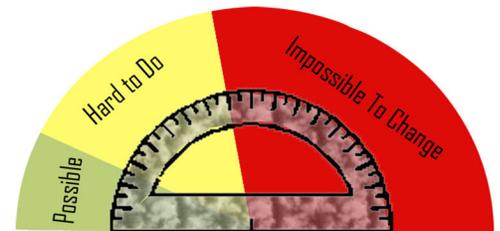
Investing too much time trying to coach radical change

I believe people can change and learn new skills. My consulting practice helps executives gain new perspectives and tools to lead people and organizations. That being said, many leaders invest too much time trying to coach radical changes in behavior.

People behave the way they do for a good reason. Their behavior makes sense to them based on the way they think and see the world. Mid-career professionals with a track record of success have an ingrained way that they think about their role, how organizations work, and what leads to success. If that doesn't mesh with your organization's style, culture or with your needs as a manager, there is only so much you can do to create a sustainable change in their fundamental behavior.

You can apply pressure to create a change in the short term, but once the pressure is gone, most people will snap back to the way they're used to interacting with the world. They have to revert, simply because it doesn't make sense to them to behave any differently. Coaching for new perspective or new skills is much more successful. While dramatic behavioral change is uncommon, learning how to apply new tools can be accelerated with good executive coaching.

We owe our employees honest feedback and good coaching. As pointed out in the model in Blind Spot #2, we need to ensure our expectations have been clearly communicated. But I have seen this situation so many times. Leaders invest time and effort to try to dramatically change behavior when someone is just a bad fit for the role or organization. It always has the same ending. Failure to meet expectations and employee dissatisfaction is always the result. It is just a matter of how long leaders choose to allow employees to fail and how long they will try to do the impossible.



Success is directly related to the number of "Degrees of Behavioral Change" needed when coaching performance.

Most of the time, organizations ask search firms like ours to be part of their radical change efforts. Over the years, I find this usually falls into 2 functional executive searches - CEO or VP of Worldwide Sales. These two functional roles, and their direct reports, historically are most often targeted to drive radical transformation.

I agree with Allen's assessment that 5°-10° change is possible, and worth attempting...anything further is fraught with risk. You must consider not only the need for change necessary in a single position, but also that there will be change or adaptation necessary within the immediate group, or even an entire functional vertical, affected by the position in question. It is key to clearly

define the time and energy an investment in change will take, and how long it will realistically take the current team to buy into a new vision.

I would argue that if you honestly ask an executive when they knew "it wasn't working" with an element of a team they inherited...they would say in the very first 1-on-1 or within weeks at most. Yet common organization development textbooks tell us new executives shouldn't "blow up" a team or to watch and listen for 6-12 months before enacting real change. This is nonsense. I have seen far too many executive ignore their gut...and, in turn, waste valuable time when they could be building a team truly capable of making a 90° turn.

LEADERSHIP BLIND SPOT #6:

Hiring for capability and nothing else

A successful candidate for a role must have the capabilities, the necessary skills, to perform the targeted work. We have gotten fairly good at assessing this through evaluating work history, conducting interviews, and qualifying references. While capability is important, it is insufficient for success. I have seen many people who have the skills and experience to perform a role, but fail to do so successfully. *Why?* They often lack the other two critical elements — Passion and Fit.



There are many tasks that I can perform well, but I don't want to do them. A job with too high a mix of these undesired tasks will not be one performed well. Doing this work does not fuel the motivation that creates sustained high performance. I need to do work that I am good at AND that I am passionate about.

Fit is the final element required for sustained high levels of performance and employee satisfaction. A successful employee can work within the framework of how decisions are made, with the resources and tools available, and in a manner consistent with the personality of the organization. All environments are different and what is required for success can vary greatly from one company to another. Just because someone was successful in their prior company doesn't mean they will be in yours.

A good hire has the required capability, passion for the work, and is a good fit for an organization. The intersection of these three elements is the source of long-term employee satisfaction.

Over the years, I have come to believe that the 'self-awareness' of a potential candidate is one of the most elegant and dependable ways of looking into Fit and Passion. I believe the best candidates inherently understand their own strengths and weaknesses. They know what they can handle, they know and recognize where they struggle...and, oddly enough, they embrace it...and aren't afraid of acknowledging it.

These types of 'self-awareness' discussions are always deeper, more open, and give the interviewer insights into how and why the candidate makes his/her decisions. In the end, you can start to make some assumptions. Does the way the candidate thinks fit your cultural *modus operandi*?

When asking the questions in the sidebar on Capability, Fit and Passion, look for thoughtfulness in a candidate's answer and a reflective nature. Is the individual aware of what subordinates/peers/management think of them? Not their own perceptions, but others'. What is on a resume (Capabilities) is one thing, but the ability to assess how one has grown, how they have challenged themselves, or understanding their ability to expand skills even further equally important.

I challenge you on your next interview - dig deeper! Have another level of conversation with your candidate.

How to Measure Capability, Passion & Fit in an Interview?

Don't tell an applicant what you are looking for or they will shape their answers to please you. Don't let them tell you what they would do... you want to hear what they've done.

Listed here some questions to use in the interview process to get at these qualities in a candidate. Compare what you gather from the interview with what you receive in both candidate provided references and any independent sources you can find.

C - Capability

- ~ What have others told you that you do best?
What are your key capabilities?
- ~ What were the key measures of success in your previous positions? How did you perform against the expectations that were set?
- ~ Can you give me 3 examples of work that you have done that is similar. *Press for specifics.*

P - Passion

- ~ What work projects have you most enjoyed?
Give me 3 examples.
- ~ What parts of your past work have energized you? Why?
- ~ What work projects have you least enjoyed?
Why?
- ~ Describe a time when you didn't give up on an idea or position despite opposition from others.

F - Cultural Fit

- ~ What work environments from your past have you enjoyed most? The least enjoyable?
- ~ What are you looking for in your coworkers and supervisors?
- ~ Describe the characteristics you want in your new company?
- ~ Describe a time when your priorities didn't match a more senior level manager's. How did you handle the situation?
- ~ Why did/are you leave/leaving your last/current position? - *Listen for what didn't work, probe hard here and get specifics.*

Leaders vastly underappreciate the opportunity they have to increase performance capacity in their organizations. The current capabilities and limitations of your team are just that. They are what exist today. But they are only limitations if you don't choose to do anything to improve. I believe leaders should ask themselves this question everyday: "What have I done today to make my team better?" So many leaders simply accept what they have with no plans to make them better...everyday.

You can grow capacity in three ways: hire the right new talent, coach your existing talent, and/or improve teamwork and coordination.

Let's apply this to how a coach approaches the capabilities of a team. When a basketball coach considers developing the best team possible, he thinks "I can make the team better by getting more talented players...or I can coach to improve the skills of the players I have." Most coaches continually do both of these. Instead, many managers accept limitations and simply accept what the team can and can't do.

The coach can also improve team performance by ensuring the players understand their individual roles, the game plan, and how they will work together. Working on how plays are executed and developing the teamwork of his players is a huge improvement opportunity. Think about America's Olympic basketball "Dream Teams." Here were teams comprised of the best players in the world, and yet they were defeated by teams with nowhere near their level of talent. Teamwork is a differentiator.

You can recruit new talent, coach what you have, and/or focus on improving execution through better

teamwork. The choice is yours. Accept what you have or choose to build new capability each day.

A strategic executive search partner can be a critical element of this capacity improvement effort. Good search partners develop deep understanding of a client's business, jobs and culture. They can be critical advisors assisting you in making sure you hire for Capability, Passion and Fit. Find a search partner that wants to develop a long-term relationship and one that seeks to drive success for your organization.

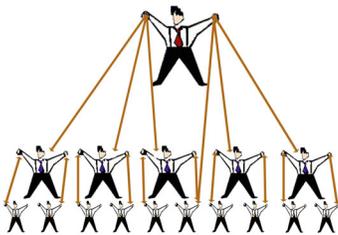
There are definitely some key differences between a search partner and a firm simply looking to earn a fee. In strategic terms, a search is not a matter of just finding a person to hire, but filling a need to locate and apply the right new set of resources. To ensure your search partner is going to invest in the success of your company, and spend the time to explore what challenges you are looking to address with a new hire, you should ask these essential questions:

- Who is going to conduct the search at the firm and what is their total workload?
- Does the lead Partner personally conduct all of the candidate development?
- What is their experience helping resolve multiple agendas?
- What is their personal network and ability to discern leadership?
- What are the "blockage or hands-off" issues that mitigate attracting exceptional leaders?
- What is the commitment to "stay out" after search completion?

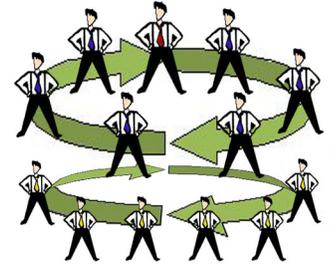
LEADERSHIP BLIND SPOT #8:

Acting as the sole integrator of team goals and performance

I see this mistake made at every level of management, but it has the greatest negative impact on those at the top. This blind spot involves the manager acting as the sole integrator of the work across the organization. Everything flows through one leader — every individual's contribution, every project strategy, all data. It is all gathered in the central hub where the manager plays a singular role integrating outcomes across the functions. The leader becomes responsible for many of the decisions or the sole initiator of all key actions.



This creates a chokepoint for getting things done, and limits an organization's or company's growth potential. The larger and more complex the organization, the less likely that one leader will have the capacity to be effective, actively directing and integrating the processes of all the spokes. Invariably, the process breaks down and productivity suffers.



A better approach is one of shared accountability. The CEO or manager shares the company or division goals and responsibilities across the next level down. Goals and rewards then spread the responsibility across the organization. The functional leaders drive excellence within their vertical, but are also responsible for how their part fits across the organization and the performance of the whole piece.

To cross over your hub and spoke management process to the shared accountability model, create expectations and a system of accountability and review that rewards functionality across borders. This effort will pay off across the whole organization, but most especially for the leader who is no longer singularly tied at the hub, but is able to focus on the whole and nimbly respond to any problems.

It is notable that instances of leaders being the 'sole integrator' are especially prevalent among founding CEOs of smaller entrepreneurial organizations. The technology marketplace, especially known for being nimble and fast-paced, is filled with many early stage and seed funded companies that fit that bill.

Conventional wisdom would lead you to believe that a company ranging in size from 5-100 would have no issues in communicating or setting direction, but in fact some of the worst cases of Allen's Blind Spot # 8 happen here. These types of companies foster highly personal environments. Founders, who often own the IP, or thought of the original business plan, own a larger share

of equity and because of this closely guard decisions, data, or a free flow of communication. Don't get me wrong, there are fantastic examples of founders taking organizations to greatness, but so many more end in failure for this very reason - being a sole integrator stymies performance.

If you are a board member of a large or small entity, help create and encourage an environment where the CEO embraces shared responsibility. Your biggest pay off will be a CEO that becomes more creative, embraces new ideas, and finds more time to be strategic. Unlock the growth potential in shared accountability.

LEADERSHIP BLIND SPOT #9:

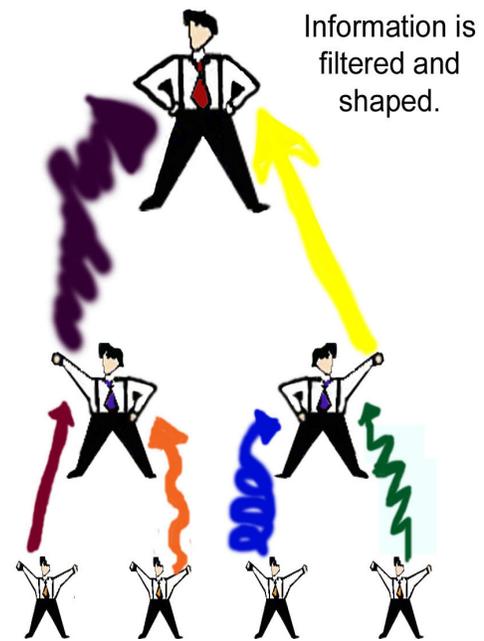
Believing all needed info flows up and down

Communication, as we know, works two ways, so I suppose it makes sense that managers are blind about the flaws in their organization's communication both up from the ranks and down from the c-suite.

No matter your level of management, never believe that you have all of the needed information and therefore know the Truth. In actuality, you might have something that looks like the Truth. The more complex the channels, the deeper the organizational levels, the more formal the culture – the more near to nothing like the Truth you are.

This is particularly true if you are depending only on the information that comes to you via formal channels. Information is shaped and filtered as it travels through each level, becoming warped or incomplete. If you use this as a single source for the Truth about your company, you will make flawed decisions.

To address this you need to institute communication mechanisms that create a culture of transparency. Simply put, communicate in a variety of ways. Email, roundtables, skip level meetings, even just walking around can provide invaluable and, oftentimes, non-verbal information. This way you know what interpretations to believe that come through the hierarchy. Approach it with the mindset of "As a leader, I know what I heard might resemble the truth, but this needs context and I need to find another way to sense what is actually going on."



Managers are often equally blind in their perception of how much of the information they are communicating down is actually heard and understood, again especially in a very hierarchical structure. The same structure that filters information going up can inhibit information flowing down. Pointed feedback, good or bad, on projects can be softened, warped or lost. To help ensure message communication flow, create additional indirect methods of contact between levels.

LEADERSHIP BLIND SPOT #10:

Going quiet in times of change and uncertainty

When stressed or in times of uncertainty, the key leaders within a company tend to go quiet just when the people around and beneath them need to hear from them. Most people don't like the idea of standing in front of folks and delivering bad news or incomplete messages. As a group, managers are trained to be the people that have the answers. They often fall into uncertain territory when they can't tell a "complete" story of problem, cause, solution. However, it is exactly when there is uncertainty that leaders need to guide an organization's view – defining reality and risk. If leaders abdicate this role, organizations will fill the void, usually with the more tragic interpretation or a negative spin on the challenge facing the company.

Manage your organization's collective understanding of a problem. Talk truth as you know it to be, explain what is known and what is unknown clearly, and be willing to say "I don't know" or "I am going to have to look into that further." A true leader shares the

brutal reality that the organization faces and potential consequences to both the company and individuals. Then, that leader creates a picture of hope about what can happen and how the organization can deal with it in a positive way. The key is a balanced message – not overemphasizing the end of the world negativity, nor delivering only sunshine and roses.

In a difficult situation, people value having facts and a leader's input to anchor their reactions to. Simply put, do you let your company's collective viewpoint of a situation form organically through the rumor-mill? The rumor-mill never creates uplifting inspirational messages. Or, do you as the leader manage that viewpoint proactively? To do so, you must engage your employees even when the picture and therefore the answers are not clear. When managers run and hide from the unknown, the organization staggers and spins in an unpredictable way.

In the process of carrying out business, we oftentimes forget that the consumer is not the only audience watching and evaluating us – as a company, a functional group, and/or as an individual leader. Our stakeholders also include boards, employees and vendors. The most savvy and successful leaders are often those who are aware of how the flow of information can affect their professional reputation and are able to proactively manage that. In today's social media-focused society, a badly handled conversation can explode into a corporate crisis.

Staying silent when change is looming or happening is never a good thing and shooting from the hip is often no better. When a change of leadership is impending, it is important to keep control of the company's public

image by agreeing ahead of time what the company's official stance is, what employees/vendors/customers need to know about the process, and then being sure to communicate that in a timely effective manner. When I am leading a search for a new CEO, I often warn clients about the collateral damage that can be done simply by not handling the relationship with all the variations of the "public" well. We emphasize strategic planning around the message that is given to stakeholders and consumers, as well as the one given to potential candidates. It's important to consider job seekers an audience. After all, a top-level candidate may someday work for a future vendor, key customer or ally.

The simple key is to communicate... honestly, thoughtfully and often.

CONCLUSION |

These are all manageable issues. I have coached many managers successfully through each one of these challenging blind spots. Following the recommendations I've laid out will bring about significant and positive change. But the reality is, leaders often don't see or have the experience or capacity to approach these often multi-faceted human resource concerns.

Having someone take a fresh look at your organization and help shine a spotlight on these issues, can be worth the investment. Each one of these Blind Spots directly impacts your company's productivity, financial performance, and employee effectiveness.

In my business, I focus on finding employees that are self-aware of their strengths and weaknesses. I would challenge you to pursue this type of self-awareness, both as a manager and as a team member. There are many resources outside of our microcosms that when tapped to evaluate and improve ourselves and our teams pay off exponentially long-term. Not only in terms of a better functioning, happier team/company, but also in real terms of positively impacting production, strategic relationships and the bottom line.

Be a hero for your company, find a knowledgeable resource who can assist you with turning a laser focus on just one of these Blind Spots and **watch yourself go from good to GREAT as a leader!**

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Sockwell Performance Advisors is an executive coaching and enterprise development consulting firm. Our practice is centered on assessing organization capability and developing strategies to improve leadership effectiveness and financial performance. We also offer services for functional and enterprise strategic planning and restructuring, mergers and acquisition planning, executive transition management, coaching and executive on-boarding.



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