CAREER STALLING COMPETING COMMITMENTS

Interactions with bosses led to bad feelings – frustration, disappointment, anger, sadness, disgust or hurt – about nine out of ten times. Daniel Goleman

New Year resolutions often don't make it past January 31. What is the source of the force that stops us following through on what we want to do? For instance, giving up smoking. We now know that the difficulty is not just the addiction and habit. There are two other important factors – putting on weight and losing valued social interactions. Unless we deal with these other needs our resolution won't work.

At work, we have self-protective competing commitments that are career stallers. They are based in unconscious beliefs. When brought into the light of day, these beliefs seem rather ridiculous:

- *If I did hear about problems I can't fix, people would discover I'm not qualified to do my job*
- *My group are not as smart or experienced as I am and I'd be wasting my time and others if I don't maintain control*
- *People might discover I'm no smarter than they are if I replace trying to be interesting with reasonable and considered statements.*

We can choose to attack, defend or communicate in our conversations. Mostly, we attack or defend. We nag, blame, complain based in self-defeating beliefs that may be unconscious but, nevertheless, tend to lead to under-achievement and cause the very effects we were trying to avoid. If people don't speak up at meetings is it because you don't release all the information needed in order for others to make a good decision (even though you believe in shared decision making)? Are you somewhat afraid that others won't make good decisions and you'll get inferior results? If your subordinates keep you out of the loop, is it because you shoot the messenger (even though you believe in open and candid communication)? Are you somewhat afraid that you'll hear about a problem you can't fix? If people are not enthusiastic enough is it because you express your opinion with enough emotion for all (even though you believe eliciting energy needs people to feel free to express in their own way)? Are you somewhat afraid that if you take a considered and objective approach people may find out the job is boring & not worth doing?

THERE ARE BIG ASSUMPTIONS COMPETING WITH THE RESOLUTIONS YOU MAKE TO CHANGE. If they do not seem rather ridiculous to you, then you have some observation and reflection to do to improve your awareness of the effects your behaviour has on others. This is done by having an inner conversation following the sequence above:

1. What Matters? All complaints come from commitments. Move your attention from the complaint to what you feel committed to.

2. What's Up? Your complaining tends to blaming. Move from blaming to where you can take personal responsibility.

3. What's so? Instead of jumping in to making new resolutions based on taking some responsibility for the situation, reflect more on what would be interrupted by a new resolution. Is there a deeper commitment that will make keeping the resolution difficult?

4. What if? Now there arises the possibility that you do not hold these alternative commitments. Perhaps they are holding you. What is there a Big Assumption that is holding you?

COMPLAINTS IMPLY CONCERNS WHICH IN TURN IMPLY COMMITMENTS: QUESTIONS TO FIND THEM.

What sorts of things would be more supportive of your effectiveness at work or so that work would be more satisfying?

e.g. My subordinates keep me out of the loop. They talk about each other and gossip behind each other's back.

Now engage yourself in these inner conversations:

What Matters? *What commitments are implied in the answer?*
e.g. I believe in open and candid communication

What's Up?   *What are you doing, or not doing, that is keeping your commitment from being more fully realised?*
e.g. I tend to shoot the messenger of bad news. Silently, I collude in it being o.k. to talk behind one another's back.

What's So?   *If you imagine doing the opposite of the undermining behaviour, do you detect in yourself any discomfort, worry, or vague fear?*
e.g. I'll hear about a problem I can't fix. My collusion comes from being concerned that people should feel comfortable with me – almost 'one-of-the-boys'.

What if? *By engaging in this undermining behaviour, what worrisome outcomes are you committed to preventing?*
e.g. I don't want to learn about problems I can't fix and at the same time I worry about not building relationships of trust.

The **Big Assumptions** may be: e.g. If I did hear about problems I can't fix, people would discover I'm not qualified to do my job If people saw me as holier-than-thou my interactions would by formal and functional - work a nightmare.

These Big Assumptions become your default mode based in an unexamined fear of dire consequences.

Even if we go through these stages of awareness and analysis we tend to repress our discoveries. We look through the Big Assumption and tend to forget it. In order to look at it and embed a new assumption take some small steps:

5. So What?   a) Observe your behaviour in relation to the Big Assumption(s) for a week or two. Make notes. Note the different areas it surfaces.

b) Actively seek experiences that cast doubt on Big Assumptions.

c) Explore the history of the Big Assumption(s).

d) Design and test – in a modest way, in a safe environment – the Assumption.

These steps allow the move of meaning from subject to object; from being held by the assumption to having it and choosing a new one. It takes time for the emotions to adjust.

e.g. In the case above, the manager solicited issues from two of his direct reports and discovered that he personally was not expected to have or find the solutions. In fact, the open discussion helped him discover that by acting as an intelligent sounding-board his subordinates found a way to progress. He found that asking questions was better than providing answers.

6. What now? Personal transitions or transformations of a manager can deeply affect the work environment, the context. In order to create a context that is supportive of high performance the inner conversations must start public social conversations.

Organizational Learning
through Management Development

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