

Growth after a Leadership Assessment

by Dennis Hooper, copyright © 2004, published in the Houston Home Journal on Tuesday, August 31, 2004

Last week, my column dealt with how you as a leader can evaluate your skills in 67 specific attributes of leadership. “So what’s next?” is the obvious question!

First, let’s deal with a common stereotype. Many people, when they hear the words “leadership development,” think of organized classes. Sure, I can teach classes (conflict resolution, delegation, time management, etc.), but I prefer a more personalized approach.

That’s the purpose of the assessment. Training is of little value unless it is pointed at accomplishing some specific desired result important to the individual.

In my coaching of leaders, I’ve found that growth occurs in three very specific stages. The first two enhancements are usually unexpected and occur because of increased awareness. Immediately, improved behaviors occur, without any additional training or stimulation. It’s awesome to observe someone functioning in a much healthier state just by being exposed to new information!

The third stage is where you build genuine new skill. This takes time, as some trial and error must occur. Feedback and self-reflection are necessary for lasting competencies to take hold. Self-discipline and tenacity are required, because genuine skill building does not come easily.

Awareness gained in the self-assessment. I mentioned last week that people are often surprised that as many as 67 different attributes contribute to success as a leader. (If it were easy, don’t you think we’d see a lot more competent leaders around?)

The act of evaluating yourself in each of 67 areas is both fun and grueling. You come face to face with elements of your behavior that you usually avoid or overlook. You are forced to admit that some things you don’t do very well. You realize that there are probably good reasons why you’ve blown some opportunities.

And yet there are pleasant surprises, too. You recognize that some things that come easy for you are valuable skills. You judge that you’ve probably been taking some of your strongest attributes for granted, not giving yourself credit for your capabilities!

Awareness gained as you consider specific improvement opportunities. I suggest that you select two to four specific areas where you would like to make improvement. You should not limit this only to attributes where you assessed yourself weak—sometimes the greatest return on a growth investment will occur in an area that is already a strength for you.

There are plenty of resource materials to help you consider improvement opportunities. As I share suggestions to consider, I can see the “ahas” popping in your brain. The openness that exists after having done the assessment causes a fresh way of looking at past behaviors. You immediately gain new insights about what you might do in the future.

Competency developed over time. I usually encourage building the development plan to encompass about a year’s time. I like your boss to be a part of creating this plan, so that you will have support over the long haul and so that the accountability will have some “teeth” in it. It’s too easy to build an aggressive plan, then allow time to diminish your commitment to implementing it.

The best leadership development procedures occur when there is an organization-wide priority on personal growth. This requires a coordinated process driven by professionally trained human resource managers and supported passionately by the top executives. Further, you need the cooperation and involvement of line managers and the employees themselves.

If you’d like to conduct a leadership self-assessment, and maybe consider building a long-term leadership development program in your organization, let’s talk.