

How Well Do Your Teammates Know You?

by Dennis Hooper, copyright © 2013, published in the *Savannah Business Journal* on Mon., May 27, 2013

Balance.....Balance, in just about any area of life, is so very hard to achieve and almost impossible to maintain. Proper balance is one of the most difficult aspects of being a leader. People seem to routinely complain that you aren't doing enough of this or you're doing too much of that.

Take "personal disclosure" for example. We've all suffered the loudmouths who constantly brag about their skills and accomplishments; they give us far too much personal information. Conversely, we've all known individuals who seem to shrink quietly into the background; they are much too easy to overlook.

How about you? How much do you reveal to your colleagues about who you are, what motivates you, and what you believe? Personal disclosure is one of the many characteristics I ask leaders to evaluate when I start serving as their coach. It's often a surprise to leaders that sharing about who you are and what drives you might be such an important contributor to leadership success.

Here is the description of "personal disclosure" as provided in a well-known assessment instrument:

- shares his or her thoughts about personal strengths, weaknesses, and limitations
- admits mistakes and shortcomings
- is open about personal beliefs and feelings
- is easy to get to know for those who interact with him or her regularly

To be sure, this characteristic of self-disclosure can be overused. You might turn people off with your directness and self-focus. You may open yourself to criticism because of your blatant honesty. Your willingness to be so transparent may diminish your credibility with those who believe leaders should maintain a significant distance between themselves and those under their authority.

As a leader, you serve as a role model in everything you do. Sharing information about yourself is no exception. If you want to know and understand what's important to the people under your authority, setting the example simply makes sense.

We humans have an innate tendency to reciprocate kindness shown to us. If you are willing to share information about yourself, others tend to be willing to share information about themselves in return.

What kinds of information do people who work with you want to know? Certainly one topic of information almost everyone would like to understand is why you do what you do.

That might include why you chose to enter this particular field of work, how your career developed over time, and why you currently work where you do, doing what you do. People realize you have choices (as they do). They want to understand why you've chosen to be where you are rather than work elsewhere. If they respect you and you remain with your current employer even when you could go elsewhere, perhaps there is reason for them to be loyal also.

People want to know what interests you have outside of work, too. Some individuals might have difficulty believing you have a life outside the workplace. (We sometimes have distorted images of our bosses!) Do you have a family? If so, what kinds of situations do you face at home as you manage the limited number of hours available to you in a day?

Are you familiar with the "JoHari Window" as a way of thinking about interpersonal relationships? It's a valuable model for a leader to understand. Search for it on the internet. Or go to the Article Archives page on my website and scan alphabetically for "Disclosure and Feedback--JoHari Window."

Knowing more about a person strengthens your relationship with him or her. The foundation for all organizational productivity is the vibrancy of relationships between colleagues.

The health of your organization's culture is predominantly your responsibility. The basic building block of that culture is personal relationships. You are the most significant factor in setting the tone in your culture, and you do that through your personal relationships. Consider this: how well do your teammates know you?

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