

Vulnerability and Interdependence--Part 2

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Two weeks ago, I had not expected a “Part 2” for this article. However, great conversations with clients and supplemental private thoughts require that I engage you in further exploration of acknowledging your limitations. Hint: being sincerely transparent with your colleagues is not easy!

Allow me to share two lines from the previous “Vulnerability and Interdependence—Part 1” article. These observations come from DeAnna Murphy, lead author of *Shift Up: Strengths Strategies for Optimal Living*. (You can learn about DeAnna and her work at www.peopleacuity.com.)

“Strengths exist so we can make a difference in others’ lives.” That should be no big surprise to anyone.

“Weaknesses exist so that other people can make a difference in our lives.” Okay, so maybe that’s not such a big surprise, either. However, I confess that I had never thought of my limitations quite that way.

Interdependence and collaboration have always seemed like such an improvement over independence to me. I’ve struggled for years to understand why some leaders cling so strongly to “doing it my way!” Explanations for such tenacity never were satisfactory. I now realize from studying DeAnna’s work that moving to interdependence requires vulnerability associated with acknowledging your limitations.

We humans are amazingly capable of self-deception. Confidence in your capabilities can blind you to your weaknesses. Years of having to rely on creativity, bravado, and justification can lead you to believe you can do anything—or rationalize away the stimulant to do something recommended by someone else.

Sadly, I know this from personal experience. I explained away an interpersonal limitation for over twenty-five years. Only recently was I humbled by two loving individuals who would not allow the deception to continue. For too long, I had ignored the symptoms, denied that my behavior was inappropriate, and pretended that if the other person would act in a certain way, I would respond more appropriately.

As I denied, ignored, and pretended, there was little hope of freeing me from the misplaced behaviors. To begin making progress, I had to acknowledge my limitations that had been so evident to others. Once I did, my teammates were more than willing (and able) to support my transformation.

Is self-deception preventing you from enhancing your collaboration with a colleague, your boss, or your direct report? Consider whether pride or fear might be lurking beneath the surface.

Pride and confidence feel very similar. Confidence is a necessary contributor to moving toward interdependence. However, pride closes out the possibility for another person to function in a genuinely collaborative way with you. Pride discourages others from wanting to engage constructively with you.

I think it’s very hard for an individual to discern alone the difference between pride and confidence. Overtly seeking feedback from individuals you trust can be hugely valuable in this situation. If they believe you are sincere in your quest for understanding, they will give you an indication of how much arrogance and condescension seem to come across as you interact with others.

Fear may be easier to discern alone, but a lifetime of cover-up can make this difficult as well. Again, a known and trustworthy person can be invaluable as you do the introspection necessary to evaluate if fear is preventing you from being transparent with your colleagues. Whatever doubts you have will become clearer if you can spread them out and examine them with someone who you know will support you.

A few years back, I wrote “Fear and Pride--Deterrents to Service.” You may find it on my website, www.buildingfutureleaders.com/article-archives.html. Scroll down to find the article alphabetically.

As with other business decisions, consider the cost and the potential benefits. What will you sacrifice if you acknowledge your limitations and seek the support of team members who have strengths in your weak areas? And what potential gain will accrue for those individuals, you, and the organization? If the benefits outweigh the cost, why continue to refuse to seek the support of your colleagues?