

“Our Personal Bias”

by Markku Kauppinen

A couple of years ago I received a call from a consultant who was using *Extended DISC Job Analysis* with one of his clients. He was in charge of a project to help a client identify the behavioral requirements of a successful store manager. While the top management was reasonably satisfied with the performance of most of the stores, it also believed that many of the managers were doing only a mediocre job. However, no one was quite sure how to best improve their performance.

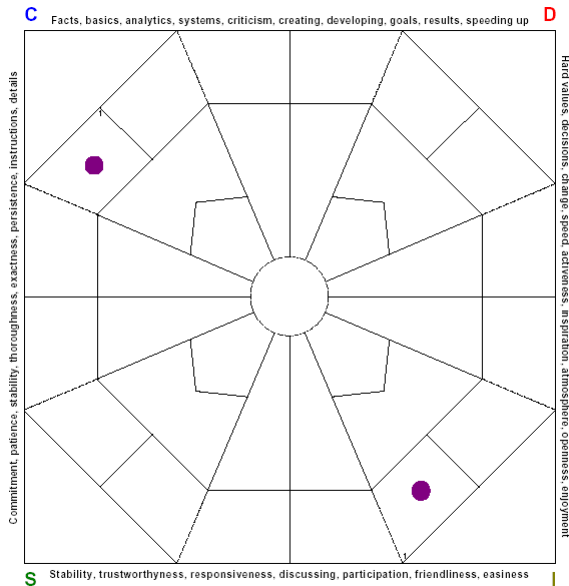
The client was a furniture retail chain in the South. It was a family-owned business. The company had been in business for almost 80 years and was doing well, with sales of about \$200 million and growing steadily.

Change was about to take place. The company's CEO was going to retire soon and his son was going to take the helm. The transition was expected to be fairly smooth because the son had been involved in the business from an early age. Most of the employees knew him or at least of him. Also, everyone had always known that this hand-off of the leadership position would eventually take place. The father had been in the same position 35 years ago as he took over from the founder of the company – his father.

The father and the son were quite different. Although both were very committed to the success of the business, their leadership styles were almost opposite. The father was very outgoing and gregarious. He seemed to have endless energy that he expressed freely. The son, although likeable enough, was analytical, systematic and more difficult to get to know.

The father, the son and the top four store managers were asked to participate in the assessment. The results of the *Job Analysis* revealed that the father and the son perceived the ideal store manager behaviors to be almost opposite. Father believed the best style of manager should be outgoing, talkative, enthusiastic, persuasive, animated and energetic. He believed – and we see this happen often – that the ideal store manager

essentially should be like him. After all, he was successful. His results indicated that the best kind of manager was an I-style in our model (see the dot in the bottom right quadrant on the model below).



The son, on the other hand, deemed the ideal style to be analytical, logical, precise, systematic and more cautious. His results indicated that the best kind of manager was a C-style (the dot in the top left quadrant).

However, the most startling finding was that none of the top store managers could define the ideal store manager. Consequently, their assessment results were what we often call a “flat-line”. It indicated that the store managers perceived the ideal style manager should be able to do it all – they should be able to demonstrate all behavioral styles at the same time. Obviously, it is an impossible feat.

The consultant was puzzled. How could all of the top store managers generate the same type of results?

Further discovery revealed that both the father and the son visited the stores often. It was part of the culture to “visit the troops” often. When the father showed up, it was always a party atmosphere. He would enthusiastically talk to everyone, shake their hands and ask questions about the employees’ family members. “How is

your daughter, Sue, doing? Is she still playing volleyball? He did not always get the names and the sports right, but his smile and enthusiasm was genuine. He was also full of fun ideas about how to build excitement at the stores. “Let’s have a sales contest!! The salesperson who sells the most next month will win a weekend for two in Las Vegas. This will be lots of fun!” he would declare cheerfully.

The son’s visits were a different story. On the way to the manager’s office, he would shake a few hands and say some words. But, he would quickly find his way to the manager’s office and dive into the store’s books. “Bob, your overtime expense is still creeping up”, he would comment. “You need to get this under control soon. I want you to email your weekly numbers to me every Monday morning. I want to stay informed.”

Clearly the managers were receiving very mixed signals. On the one hand the emphasis was squarely on the people-side. On another, the focus was very task-focused and operational. It was virtually impossible for the managers to respond to both demands. They were in an uncomfortable spot and when asked what the ideal style should be, the answer was not surprising anymore. You needed to be a little bit of everything. “Is Clark Kent looking to change careers?”

Who we are creates a significant bias at many levels. It affects how we see the world and what we believe creates success. To deny this adversely affects our performance. To be aware of it, we are armed with the knowledge to improve our success. What are your leaders expecting from their employees?

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“Why Even Thinking About Retirement Can Be a Bad Idea”

by Marshall Goldsmith

We often dream about all the things we'll do once we retire. What we don't think about is how much we'll hate it.

My friend Dave was bubbling with enthusiasm. His company had just been acquired, and he had hit the jack-pot. After years of hard work, he was worth many millions of dollars. To make things even better, he didn't have to stick around through the transition. At only 48, he now had the time, resources, and energy to do whatever he wanted. Dave's face lit up as he described his new future: trips to exotic places, golfing whenever and wherever he liked, unlimited time to enjoy his wife and family. Life was going to be wonderful.

Six months later, Dave was home alone and miserable. The kids were away at college. After the remodeling of their home, his wife had become bored. She poured herself into a new job and seemed to be gone a good deal of the time.

One day, a deliveryman came over to drop off a package. Dave's house was his last stop for the day, so Dave asked him in. Over a cup of coffee, the two engaged in what became a fascinating discussion. The courier surprised Dave with his keen insight into current global problems and his grasp of complex economic issues.

"What a neat conversation," Dave later thought. "In fact, that conversation was so much fun, it was the highlight of my week!"

It was a revelation. When my friend looked in the mirror that afternoon, he saw the face of a guy who had been watching reruns of *Everybody Loves Raymond* on TV. For fun, he was playing mediocre golf and listening to old men at the country club repeat the same old war stories about what they used to do. He asked himself, "Did I just say the highlight of my week was bullshitting with the delivery guy about the world's problems?"

Within two weeks, Dave had a new job. He realized that retirement, or even thinking and

planning for retirement, isn't all that it may seem to be.

I have had the privilege of getting to know many of the top thinkers in my field. They could all retire if they wanted to. But most do not. People like Peter Drucker, former Girl Scouts leader Frances Hesselbein, and Warren Bennis are amazing. They just keep on making great contributions. They aren't working for money, prestige, or status. They are working because they love what they do, and they are making a positive difference in the world. Together with my friend Dave, they have taught me a great lesson: Our traditional notion of retirement is greatly overrated.

I was lucky enough to be with one of the most respected consultants in organizational change, Richard Beckhard, a couple of days before he died. Dick was a great coach and mentor, as well as an inspiration for many people in our field. When I last visited him, Dick knew that his life was almost over. His doctor respected him enough to let him know that he was not going to recover, and he needed to say his last farewells.

As I watched Dick answer a series of phone calls, I found him not only saying good-bye. He was continuing to help other people. I was amazed at the excitement and enthusiasm he was able to convey. He was working with people in the same caring and effective way he always had.

My first thought was, "Dick, why don't you just let it go and take care of yourself? You've done enough."

Fortunately, I kept my mouth shut. Dick was still smiling, still able to laugh, still filled with passion. He knew that he wasn't going to be around to collect the consulting fees for his final assignments. It didn't really matter. He was still doing a great job--even from his deathbed. In that instant, I made a decision. I decided that I wanted to be like Dick Beckhard when I grew up.

How many times have we all thought about how nice it would be to have enough money so that we would never have to work again? We think about all that we won't have to do: We won't have to get up early. We won't have to go to work. We won't have to meet deadlines. We won't have to be stressed. Unfortunately, it is hard to find much fulfillment in what we won't do. We can only find fulfillment and meaning in what we will do.

Dave discovered that quickly enough. Dick taught me that as well. You may well have too much intellectual curiosity and too much enthusiasm for life ever to retire. When and if that day comes, you might not be doing what you're doing now, but you will want to be doing something that matters.

Forget about retirement. Forget about planning for it. Just find something that you love to do. Maybe you can be just like Dick Beckhard when you grow up.

***Dr. Marshall Goldsmith** recently been named by the American Management Association as one of 50 great thinkers and business leaders who have impacted the field of management. His 18 books include the Business Week best-seller, *The Leader of the Future* and *Global Leadership: The Next Generation*. Marshall is a world authority in helping successful leaders achieve positive change in behavior: for themselves, their people and their teams.*

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