

How is Your GPS?

by Markku Kauppinen

My younger brother, Kari, used to be a very avid sailor. Sailing was his main passion and he spent just about all of his free time either sailing or planning his next trip. He has crossed the Atlantic a few times and knows a lot about sailing. I always liked sailing with him because he took care of everything, including the cooking and even the dishes. Not only that, he knew how to navigate and plan the best routes based on the wind and weather conditions. I could just relax and enjoy the peacefulness of being at sea.

But once, back in the early 1990's, for some unexpected reason he had to get back home early and I needed to sail his boat back from Stockholm to Helsinki. This meant I had to cross the Baltic Sea. It is not a very long trip, only about three days on the open sea.

Kari knew well the lack of my navigation skills. But not to worry, his boat had one of the early GPS navigation systems that could pinpoint the location of his treasured boat within 50 feet. More importantly, it would give me clear readings as to where to steer after Kari input the destination coordinates. As long as I would follow the system, I would arrive safely in Helsinki in a few days.

The first day and a half was non-eventful. The winds were perfect, the weather moderate and the GPS let me know what to do. Kari's GPS was not as advanced as they are today but it was fairly easy to use. It did not have a map display as the systems do today, but it provided the coordinates. The only thing I had to do was to plot the coordinates on the charts every few hours to check my progress. I was making good speed toward Helsinki.

Then suddenly, a disaster! For some unknown reason the GPS went on the fritz. I was getting completely different readings and could not even find the coordinates on the chart. I was able to find another map in the boat and, according to the GPS, I was about 120 miles south of Moscow. If your geography is a bit rusty, trust me, this was not good news and I was very lost.

For the next six long hours I improvised with compass alone heading east knowing I was very likely drifting off course. Sure enough, through my binoculars I could see a Russian Navy cruiser heading toward my direction to check out the errant sailing boat. A few minutes later a MiG blasted over me at about 300 feet helping me to make an easy decision: change course to north now!

The Cold War was over but I did not want to cross the Russian sea border and have to explain my navigation challenges. To make sure the Russians knew I had no bad intentions, I cranked on the engine to help the sails to make my retreat a little faster. The MiG did two more flyovers to make sure I would not change my mind about my new course toward north. Trust me, I kept very steady at the helm.

Thankfully a few hours later, the GPS somehow got its bearings back and I could once again find the position on the chart. I was way off the planned course but knew again where I was and where to go. The next afternoon I arrived at the destination and docked in Helsinki.

Every day we must make decisions about how to react and respond to different situations and interactions with others. Perhaps we are unexpectedly handed an important project with a tight deadline. Maybe, a key client calls with an urgent problem. Or, we may have an exciting new job opportunity with a higher pay but also increased responsibilities. In addition, throughout the day we are faced with a multitude of decisions that are not as significant yet impact our success. How to respond to someone's email, answer a colleague's question, or present our ideas at the weekly meeting.

In order to make successful decisions, it is very important we understand how to best navigate through the many options. Typically, most of us allow our natural tendencies to control our decisions. For example and depending on our "natural style", our reaction could be a quick and decisive one, or precise and contemplative. In essence, we let our autopilot take over and

guide our behavior. Frequently, we react and respond without much thought. This makes sense as it is easy, comfortable and takes little energy. Whatever our style is, there are some situations when our natural style – and response – could be the best one. Unfortunately, many times it is not making it critically important we make conscious decisions about how to modify our behavior. Just think about it. Have you ever in retrospect thought: "I probably should not have done that?"

So how can we make better decisions about how to respond and react without being overwhelmed with the many potential options?

First, we need a framework (=a map) to understand how different people behave and respond. We need to have a frame of reference to understand how others tend to behave. The reason is that they expect you to do as they would in the same situation and context.

Second, we need to clearly locate our position on the map by becoming very self-aware. We must understand what our hard-wired behavioral tendencies are and how we tend to naturally react to different situations and people. Keen self-awareness is like our GPS: it provides us a specific position on the map. If we do not know where we are, we are lost and obviously we should not even expect to reach our destination.

Finally, as long as we have a goal (=a destination) in mind, we can make decisions how to best get there. Rather than aimlessly and randomly changing directions, you can aim directly and quickly toward your goals.

What about your GPS? Do you have one and do you know where you are and where you are heading?

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Self-confidence and Success

by Marshall Goldsmith

One common characteristic of the great leaders I meet is self-confidence, which of course makes sense. Leaders have to inspire confidence in others. It would be difficult for others to believe in us if we don't even believe in ourselves.

Great leaders have to take risks. While getting to "acceptable" may not involve risk, getting to "one of a kind" does. Self-confidence gives great leaders the courage they need to take their companies—and themselves—to a new level of success.

A huge part of self-confidence comes from our previous success. Successful people tell themselves, "I have succeeded in the past. Therefore, I know I can succeed in the future." That's the good news about successful people's belief in their previous success. The bad news is that it makes it hard for them to hear negative feedback.

You may not think that this applies to you, because surely someone who can't hear negative feedback is suffering from an ego run amok. But look closely at yourself. How do you have the confidence to wake up in the morning and charge into work, filled with optimism and eagerness to compete? It's not because you are reminding yourself of the screw-ups you have created and the failures you have endured. On the contrary, it's because you edit out failures and choose to run the highlight reel of your successes.

If you're like the successful people I know, you're focused on the positives, calling up mental images when you were the star, when you dazzled everyone and came out on top. It might be those five minutes in the executive meeting when you had the floor and nailed the argument you wanted to make. (Who wouldn't run that highlight reel in their head as if it were the Sports Center Play of the Day?) It might be your skillfully crafted memo that the CEO praised and routed to everyone in the company. (Who wouldn't want to reread that memo in a spare moment?) When our actions lead to a happy

ending and make us look good, we love to replay it for ourselves.

My partner, Mark Reiter, discussed this with a baseball star. Every hitter has certain pitchers against whom he historically hits better than he does against others. The star told Mark, "When I face a pitcher whom I've hit well in the past, I always go up to the plate thinking I 'own' this guy. That gives me confidence."

"What about pitchers you don't hit well?" Mark asked. "How do you deal with a pitcher who 'owns' you?"

"Same thing," he said. "I go up to the plate thinking I can hit this guy. I have done it before with pitchers a lot better than he is."

This hitter figured out a way to use his past success and apply it to a situation that wasn't a total fit—using his prowess against certain pitchers to give him confidence when facing all pitchers. Successful people don't drink from a glass that is half empty.

When achievement is the result of a team effort—not just individual performance—we tend to overestimate our contribution to the final victory. I once asked three business partners to estimate their individual contribution to the partnership's profits. Not surprisingly, the sum of their answers amounted to more than 150% of the actual profit. Each of the three partners thought she was contributing more than half.

This overestimation of our past success is true in almost any workplace. If you ask your colleagues (in a confidential survey) to estimate their percentage contribution to your enterprise, the total will always exceed 100%. There is nothing wrong with this. (If the total adds up to less than 100%, you probably need new colleagues.)

This "I have succeeded" belief, positive as it is in most cases, can become a major obstacle when behavioral change is needed.

Successful people consistently overrate themselves relative to their peers. I have asked

more than 80,000 participants in my training programs to rate themselves in terms of their performance relative to their professional peers. We found that 80% to 85% rank themselves in the top 20% of their peer group, and about 70% rank themselves in the top 10%. The numbers get even more ridiculous among professionals with higher perceived social status, such as physicians, pilots, and investment bankers. (M.D.s may be the most delusional. I once told a group of doctors that my extensive research had conclusively proven that half of all M.D.s had graduated in the bottom half of their medical school class. Two of the doctors insisted that this was impossible.)

Please remember this as you progress in the corporate world. The higher up we go—the more successful we become—the harder it may be for us to hear negative feedback. I ask my CEO clients to complete a simple exercise. Complete this sentence, "I am success because of...," Then complete this sentence, "I am a success in spite of...."

I have never met anyone who was so wonderful that he or she had nothing on the "in spite of" list. (If I did meet such a person, I would suggest that he or she work on "humility.") My readers are generally successful people. Make your own two lists: figure out your "in spite of"—and get to work.

***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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