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There is lots of advice out there about being a ‘leader’. Most of it is good, but even the good stuff can seem theoretical, while some of the more practical stuff can be too superficial.

In this article, we will look at three easy-to-understand, but hard-to-implement, leadership themes that are actionable and effective.

**Know Yourself**

By knowing yourself you can understand where you are particularly strong and where you might need to be especially careful. It is a Career Limiting Move (CLM) in many organizations to admit that you are anything but excellent in everything, but take the risk to admit to yourself that there are just some things you can’t summon the mental energy to do well.

GMD can help you with this using a variety of tools. One such tool is the MBTI<sup>1</sup>; it can allow you to understand your preferences (strengths), pitfalls (over-strengths), challenges (development areas), and your allergies (achoo!).

So, who cares? What if I know my “allergies”? Well, perhaps at this moment, you are ‘allergic’ to certain people you work with. Chances are you may avoid, resent, or even dislike them. They seem to say the wrong thing in meetings, ask absurd questions, and often miss the point completely.

It is possible that they are just clueless, but true cluelessness is actually pretty rare. Odds are that they have different psychological preferences from you.

Once you understand that “X isn’t asking dumb questions, but just coming at issues from

a different perspective”, you might still feel exasperation, but the personal irritation fades and allows you to build a better relationship with that person; a better relationship that can lead you both to deeper and better insights. Remember: if she is your allergy, you are probably hers, too.

**But Wait, There’s More!**

Knowing who you are ‘allergic’ to is great, but understanding how you can manage yourself is even better. If you get feedback from your colleagues that ‘you don’t communicate enough’ or ‘we need better priority setting’ or ‘the team is lost in details’ these can be clear signs of a leader’s strengths becoming ‘over’-strengths and tipping into *pitfalls*. Being able to manage yourself is even better than understanding how to manage others. Really.

<sup>1</sup> MBTI – Myers Briggs Type Indicator



### Know *Some* Things

As a leader, people will be looking to you for Direction – the Board may look to you. After all, you are the resident expert in your area, not the big wigs in the Boardroom; and your people will be looking to you for a clear and un-ambiguous path toward success. A leader that has it slightly wrong, but presses ahead regardless, is in a much better place than a leader who stops, analyzes, and tinkers in repeated attempts to find the perfect track.

When the search for the perfect track happens, frustration and stagnation build in the team; deadlines aren't kept, and neither are budgets. Part of what you do needs to be Deliberate, but part is Emergent

The antidote to doing too much tinkering or charging blindly ahead, is to allow yourself as a leader to live intensely in the moment. Hold on to some things with stubbornness and strength while allowing yourself and others to recognize uncertainty and paradox, as well.

For example: Accepting that some parts of the plan just are not clear at the moment, and will probably only be clear later, if at all, can bring a healthy level of reality into your discussions, reduce skepticism and cynicism in your direct reports, and allow part of your plan to be fixed

and deliberate, while other aspects are emergent. This adds flexibility and robustness to your plans and gives focus and direction to your people.

### Friendly, not Friends

Finally, one of the most contentious topics in leadership: Leaders feel under great pressure to get to know their people; to get close; to spend more time; and to get better at 'people issues'.

On the other hand, they need to keep distance; they need to see the 'forest' and not be bogged down in the individual trees. Leaders need to take decisions that may disrupt the personal lives of their colleagues – how can you do this with people you are close to?

Finding the balance between 'getting close' and keeping 'appropriate distance' can produce unbearable tension. Many leaders just take the most straight-forward approach: they feel they can only maintain control if they keep and maintain a cool, suit-and-tie distance.

This is an easy way out and has the perverse effect of fostering an illusion of control and perfection in the leader that he or she cannot ever hope to live up to.

Because this is such a complex area, a coach or mentor is often a good instrument to help dig through assumptions about appropriate and healthy business relationships. GMD

considers the company culture then uses a practical and forward-looking coaching approach to discover and align the relationships in your team.

Know Yourself & Others, Get Focused and find Comfort in Uncertainty, ❖

*Dr. Peter Gillies is a freelance organizational development consultant and owner of GMD. He employs psychological concepts to understand and enhance organizational effectiveness. Dr. Gillies is a resident of the Netherlands and actively teaches and consults across Europe.*