

Forward Motion Coaching Newsletter

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Omniscient, Omnipresent, Omnipotent

Who among us hasn't fallen into the trap of believing that in order to be worth our salt as managers, we must be all-knowing, ever-present, and all-mighty on the job? In Truman-esque fashion we declare that the buck stops with us, and confuse *taking responsibility for getting results* with *being responsible for controlling everything* that happens with a project, department, or business unit.

Everyone knows about the bottlenecks that occur when too much information is forced to flow through one pair of hands. Commonly, managers who take responsibility for all of the details spend long hours checking the work of associates (which is often of an administrative nature) while higher level functions, like strategy setting, are neglected.

On the other hand, managers who take responsibility for results are performing a leadership function that involves setting a vision, establishing goals, devising a strategy, and managing resources. Instead of focusing on how each task is done, the *process* is evaluated. Instead of asking to review everyone's work, work *habits* are evaluated to make sure that people have the skills and resources they need for high performance.

This distinction is crucial for entrepreneurs, the newly promoted, and the currently overwhelmed. I often find with coaching clients that unreasonable or unrealistic expectations are at the heart of the all-knowing, ever-present, and all-mighty syndrome. Hopefully, you at least smiled when you read the title of this month's newsletter, because you recognize the impracticality of literally striving to be omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent.

There are a number of reasons that people fall into the control trap. They include anxiety about being held accountable, perfectionism, lack of confidence, and repeating bad habits learned from former bosses. Sometimes, people fall back on skills, such as staying on top of details, that were important in previous jobs, but not in larger roles with management responsibility.

If you find yourself mired in details that drain your energy and keep you from activities that add value to the bottom line, you may be working with unrealistic expectations. Common ones include insisting on one particular outcome, being successful on the first try, or that something happen in a certain way. Others are all or nothing thinking, and treating each setback as a disaster.

The owner of a computer consultancy was having trouble growing the business in part because she made herself responsible for the work of all of her subcontractors. She challenged any of their methods that differed from how she would have performed the work, and frequently had to correct errors made by two inexperienced technicians who she used on smaller jobs because they charged relatively low rates. Meantime, she wasn't spending enough time bringing in new clients, which raised concerns about billable hours in the coming months. She was exhausting herself trying to wear the hats of company president, director of sales, and chief technology officer.

By choosing to see herself as responsible for managing the growth of her business, not for how individuals performed their jobs, she was able to re-prioritize. She began devoting much more of her energy to revenue-generating activities, and evaluated her subcontractors based on

meaningful criteria like the end result and customer satisfaction. And, she developed clear requirements for skill levels and stopped hiring inexperienced people who demanded close supervision that she couldn't afford to give.

February's Coaching Challenge: You're in the "omniscience trap" when you're trying to handle everything yourself, rather than setting direction and managing employees or vendors. A log of all your daily activities, arranged by category, will help you determine areas where you may be devoting lots of time for little pay-back. See if you can recognize any unrealistic expectations, like those mentioned above, and in the October, 2005 edition of this newsletter (*If I See a Tiger, Do I Run?*). Seeing yourself and your habits objectively can be tough, so you may want to enlist the help of a coach, mentor, colleague, or friend. Remember, too, that changing ingrained behaviors takes time, practice, and patience, so start small in one area (see the October newsletter for some ideas).

Get clear, get focused, and take action! Coaching helps you become more resourceful and productive by developing effective strategies for change. To schedule a complimentary, no obligation needs assessment, call 508/835-2482 or email ForwardMotion@charter.net.

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