



## Forgotten Skills

### A gentle challenge identifies hidden and forgotten skills

*'If you think adventure is dangerous, try routine. It is lethal'*<sup>1</sup>...and so it is when it kills off a potential leader's desire to always be improving team and personal performance.

D, a talented operator, numbed by routine and day to day busy-ness, had got out of the habit of delegating, forgotten she had this skill and lost confidence in her leadership ability as a result. The consequent lack of initiative was stalling a hitherto promising career.

During the coaching process D became aware of *other* forgotten and unused skills and experience.

### The Background

D is one of the organisation's potential future leaders, but her recent application for promotion had been unsuccessful. Feedback from a senior colleague had described her as *'Professional, unresponsive and too comfortable or naïve'*.

D wanted to understand this feedback as it had shaken her confidence.

### The Process

Her engagement into the coaching process was guarded and it took time for her to settle.

Cautiously D explained that she is diligent in her work, comfortable to ask questions when she needs expert assistance and literal in her interpretation of instructions. She continued:

*'I can make the big decisions really easily - like buying a house or a car ... it's the small decisions that I can't make, like buying [a piece of furniture]'*.

*'I love the details – having a plan and a budget, figuring out the puzzle... fixing it!'*

Eventually we began to discuss more of the things that she found challenging.

*'I was a fraud in my earlier career], I really didn't know what I was doing... I'm feeling more confident now, but I'm good at faking it.'*

*'I like to get it right, I like being right... I'm a perfectionist, I like it all neat and orderly...I get overwhelmed if there is too much to do.'*

What about delegating things to people?

*'I don't like managing people...I don't think I'm any good at it...how do you know you are doing it right?...I should provide [my team] with mentoring... but I don't have time for them...I don't spend 'one to one' time with them.'*

Can you think of any examples when you have delegated to someone, or provided them with leadership? After some extensive searching an example was found.

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*'...I really guided them ... I worked alongside them till we turned things around ... it was a real achievement... that was a time when I had a real connection... I had a great reputation.'*

This example was important, it gave D an insight into an area where she thought she was unskilled and therefore lacked confidence, yet she had clearly been successful.

Who do you think you could delegate some things to? Immediately D responded!

*'My kids! I could delegate the tidying of their rooms! I spend ages doing the tidying for them'.*

*'I don't like delegating at work because [the team] are all under pressure and it might overload them – that's how I feel... I don't have any spare capacity.'*

The conversation probed some of the factors that might impact on D's team's capacity and opportunities were found where simple changes could be made to improve team performance.

D reflected further upon her own leadership style realising that she already had skills and experience that she had simply forgotten about and consequently had lost confidence.

We agreed some actions at the conclusion of the session, one of which was to experiment with delegation, building upon D's earlier realisation that she had previously successfully supported people.

In our second session D reported on her delegation experiments.

*'[At home] I delegated the laundry to the kids! The older one said "Yeah... whatever!", but the younger one really jumped at it – she asked how much pocket money she could earn each time – I had to teach them how to do it... now she is asking to do more laundry! I was amazed!'*

This started a discussion on how to change the way things are at work. D reported that she had begun looking at the barriers to delegation to her team – and discovered several barriers that she could overcome.

She had also reflected on the relationship she had with her boss and his behaviour.

*'He's clearly stressed...he works late all the time... he seems so overwhelmed.'*

By the end of our second session D was considering how she could be more influential and effective in 'managing her boss' and was considering asking to take work projects 'off his desk', requesting delegation - with an objective of enabling him to leave work earlier!

### The Outcomes

After two sessions D could understand the challenging feedback from one of her senior colleagues and taken action to respond to it. She had gained confidence in her own leadership and people skills and taken actions to improve the performance of both her team and her boss by encouraging 'delegation'.

*'I'm beginning to feel potentially more strategic and influential...I'm feeling that there are no roadblocks!'*

Notes: 1. Paulo Coelho