



Strengths as Weaknesses

By Dr. Jim Beaubien

Leaders are often advised to lead from strengths and compensate for weaknesses by surrounding themselves with teammates who possess complementary skill sets. This is good advice and the strategy usually works. Sometimes, however, strengths are situational. Paradoxically, when this is the case, your greatest strengths may actually become your greatest weaknesses.

Case in point. Bob is the senior executive in a highly specialized consulting firm. He's loved in his industry, excellent with people and renowned as a visionary dealmaker who can break through bureaucracy and get results. His strengths are legendary and he enjoys a reputation as the consummate leader.

This is how it looks from outside the organization; if we look inside we get a different picture. His strengths actually become his weaknesses. Let me explain what I mean.

Because of his strength as a deal maker, he is naturally inclined to make deals with employees. In the process he systematically creates a sense of inequity and unfairness amongst staff. Everything is negotiable: hours of work, pay, responsibilities and perks. The people who make the best deals are happy; the others are unhappy.

Because of his strength as a bureaucracy breaking visionary, he tends to minimize the importance of administrative structures and systems, preferring to focus on the 'big picture'. As a result, office systems are inadequate, filing systems are ineffective, computer networks are constantly going down, records are suspect, roles and responsibilities are in constant flux and people complain that no one is ever held accountable. Employees are generally unhappy and turn over is high.

So, how does Bob Deal with this? The secret is to do what he's good at and finds ways of compensating for his weakness still applies. He could do this by delegating administrative aspects to a very assertive manager with strong skills who can establish the structures and systems the organization requires.