

Modesty is for wimps

Jim Collins, the author of *Good to Great*, says Level 5 leadership (i.e. *Great* leadership) involves being modest and considerate. According to Collins, level 5 leaders “build enduring greatness through a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will”. Oh yeah?

Tell that to Jack Welch, Larry Ellison, Richard Branson, Alan Sugar, Steve Jobs, Philip Green, or a host of other highly effective and successful leaders.

Collins defined organisational “greatness” as being the ability to transform a record of average results into fifteen unbroken years of significantly above average returns. He identified eleven companies that had done this and then he looked at the characteristics of their leaders and concluded that if you wanted your company to outperform the market for fifteen years you better find a leader like that. (And by extension, if you wanted to become a leader of a highly successful company you had better concentrate on being self-effacing, thoughtful and considerate.)

However there is a gaping hole in this logic that anyone who understands even a little bit about causality and statistics understands. If you start by selecting a group of companies based on some set of outcomes and then take the fact that the outcomes correlate with the characteristics of the companies’ leaders, that doesn’t mean you can assume that the leaders *caused* the outcomes. There are all kinds of things that determine corporate effectiveness and the character of the person at the top does *not* completely overshadow everything else. Being modest, understated and humble is not necessarily how you create great results and great companies, nor is it particularly how you get to the top – or even how you progress generally.

What’s needed to succeed in organisational life is a clear personal brand. Brands are about differentiating products and services. They represent a promise about what can be expected. So what’s your brand promise? Tom Peters talks about “the brand called You” which means what people think about you, what they expect of you, what you have a reputation for, what sort of performance you have delivered in the past and what performance they believe you can deliver in the future. Modesty is not a compelling brand promise.

What do people see in you? If you believe that you’re solely responsible for your success and career, think again. You aren’t the one who makes the decision about whether to promote you, keep you or fire you; it’s your boss and your boss’s boss who make those decisions. If you haven’t made it clear to them how you add value, why should they offer you career advancement and development?

To get you started on gaining the support of your boss, here’s one suggestion. Psychological research shows that that when you do something for someone that you don’t have to do, that person’s view of you improves and they become more interested in helping you. But here’s the really interesting bit: it works the other way as well. If you ask your bosses for career advice they become interested in ensuring your career success. The reason is that when people offer advice, especially when it has been specifically asked

for, they want it to result in a positive outcome. People like to be regarded as respected advisors. It gives them a feeling of worth. It’s flattering. By asking your boss, or an individual who can influence your career, for helpful advice you make them part of solution.

Develop the brand of *You*. If you want to get ahead you have to differentiate yourself, and hiding your light under a bushel isn’t going to get you noticed. Being part of the crowd means you move with the crowd, but never faster.

Robin Stuart-Kotze
Senior Advisor

strategy people performance

Penumbra is a strategic business consultancy. We bring clarity by using research to drive understanding and direction. We deliver success by balancing experience and innovative thinking.

Whatever your aspiration, we'll provide the tools, information and analysis to turn your strategy into operational reality, in a way that motivates your people to outperform the market.

Overview

As a strategic business consultancy, our expertise is in helping our clients executing strategies and delivering results.

We achieve this by combining a robust management planning system with a focus on people which drives alignment and commitment

We work in partnership with talented and committed leadership teams to help organisations build corporate value with a wide range of customised, cross-functional advisory programmes and services delivered from four complementary service groups:

Strategy

(Development, formulation, implementation and alignment)

Our innovative **Penumbra Balance** approach creates dynamism, drives and sustains momentum and makes strategy real for stakeholders

Organisational Development

(Behavioural issues)

We call our holistic approach **Balanced Motivation** which encompasses activities that improve performance both for the organisation and the individual

Research and Insight

Our stimulating **Clarity** approach draws on our business consulting skills to deliver a mix of business analysis and market research which

provides compelling insights for winning decisions.

Operations

The Operations practice brings all of our hands-on practical experience to bear on execution and delivery of results.

Our technology enabling approach called **Totality** facilitates business focussed services and solutions, aligned to business needs, for people, processes and tools.

Why Us?

Organisations turn to us when they:

- Want to find a new strategic direction
- Have created a strategy and now need to execute it
- Need to drive more value from existing initiatives
- Have a big issue to resolve, usually dependent on lasting employee buy-in
- Need to explore new ways to drive value
- Need a breakthrough result
- Are seeking measurable results

Our Experience

We have real world experience spanning 20 years with our clients. This includes working with:

BP, Citibank, Morgan Chase, WestLB, RBS, UBS, Bankers Trust, Kleinwort Benson, Coutts, Natwest, Intel, Nokia, Adobe, Kall-Kwik, Glaxo Smith Kline,

Dupont, Pfizer, Savills, British Council, Clifford Chance, British Airways, Gillette, Unilever, Shell, Volvo, Vauxhall, British Gas, TradeStation, MWB Business Exchange, Investors in People, University of Cambridge

On projects such as:

Strategic Planning, Strategy development and implementation, Culture change, Post-Merger Integration, Vision, Purpose and Values, Current State Analysis, Organisation Re-design, Transformational Change, Client Focus Strategies, Perception Studies, Client and Staff Engagement surveys, Global Rebranding, Know your Customer, Market Forecasting, Consumer Insight, Market Segmentation, Process optimisation, Lean/Six Sigma, Project Management, ERP Systems Roll-out, Market Research, Financial Modelling, Franchise Start-up Evaluation models, Cost Benefit Analysis, Implementation Alignment, Strategic Alignment, Complex Database development, Custom Application development, Supply Chain Optimisation

Covering diverse sectors such as:

Financial Services, Pharmaceuticals, Manufacturing, Energy, Mobile Telecoms, Travel and Tourism, Aviation, Property, Hi-tech and Business Services