

Staff Development Services

building strong businesses one employee at a time.

Direction -- The ninth in our series discussing the 13 tendencies in our reports.

If you missed or, would like to review, the first four articles of this series that cover Emotional Energy (18), Stress (19), Self-Esteem (20), Optimism (21), Work (22), Detail (23), Change (24), Courage (25).

Direction — Some years ago, I met a college professor at a weekend seminar and, during a ‘break the ice’ kind of conversation, she shared that she hated being a mathematics professor. Since I have no great love of math myself, I could certainly understand that, but what I could not understand was why she chose that career path.

Her answer stunned me. During a freshman college math course, the professor told her she was not a good math student. That was enough of a challenge to push her to prove that professor wrong. She changed her major to math, got her masters, and was working on her doctorate. The woman hated her profession but was continuing her education in the same field.

She was so challenge-oriented that it actually overwhelmed her sense of direction in life. Therefore, rather than making a decision on what career she wanted to pursue, she let a challenge lead her down the wrong path. I am certain that life was difficult for her and that she was feeling a lot of stress because she was obviously not well suited to her career choice.

Her survey would undoubtedly show someone who has high courage and lower direction. She is probably that indecisive person who asks, “*Where do you want to get lunch?*” preferring that someone else make that decision. People with low self-direction prefer working in a supportive job environment where there are strict procedures to follow. And, they need a lot of time to study a situation and to talk it over with others before making a decision. Or, they procrastinate long enough that someone else has to intervene and make the decision for them.

Hesitant people (low direction) can become overstressed very quickly when they are required to work independently and show initiative in the workplace. Although the college professor apparently had high courage, those with low direction often lack an acceptable level of courage and can actually put a burden on their coworkers since they need a lot of ‘handholding’. And, if they have high work and detail, they probably need a more than average amount of training on **how** to do their job.

The college professor had too much courage and too little direction. However, many with such high courage often have too much self-direction. Their need to control makes them difficult to deal with because they have little interest in hearing what others think and we often give them titles such as ‘autocratic’. These people are not very flexible, feel that “*it’s my way or the highway*” and, therefore, do not learn from their mistakes.

The manner in which people exhibit their overly controlling nature is dependent on the combination of their other character traits and can be seen in one of two ways. Controlling people may function like a dictator who listens to no one and who can make life very difficult for everyone trying to work with them. Or, some are unable to openly gain control so they resort to manipulating people and situations by doing things covertly and this behavior is often referred to as ‘Machiavellian’.

An appropriate level of self-direction is the second linchpin in the leadership trifecta (courage, direction, assertiveness). The decisive person uses their emotional energy to analyze problems and formulate opinions before making a decision. They are self-reliant in the workplace but seek help when necessary. The appropriate combination of courage and direction lets the individual manage him/herself effectively. Add the appropriate level of assertiveness and you have an effective leader.



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P. S. *Hiring turnover is the result of not putting the right person in the right job. The Simmons Survey allows me to assess how a potential candidate is going to function in the work environment. But, I do not always know exactly how the work environment needs him/her to function. Therefore, although there is a rating score in the summary of our hiring reports, it is imperative that the entire hiring report is read to determine if the candidate is a fit for your particular situation. And, remember, I am always willing to discuss the reports in order to help you make the best hiring decisions. In fact, I hope to talk to all of you many times in 2010. Happy New Year!*

P. P. S. We have created a toolbar you can install on your browser to make it easier to administer our online survey. If you would like to examine our toolbar visit, <http://staffdevelopmentservices.ourtoolbar.com/> and you can download it for Internet Explorer, Firefox, or Safari.

“One day Alice came to a fork in the road and saw a Cheshire cat in a tree. Which road do I take? she asked. Where do you want to go? was his response. I don't know, Alice answered. Then, said the cat, it doesn't matter.” Lewis Carroll.

Health and Happiness

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