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MENTOR'S MUSINGS: *After you, who?*

By Krishna Kumar, ISEC Founder-Director

"I have often been told that the strength of a team is determined by its weakest link. But, that would sound logical only if teams functioned linearly, wouldn't it?" The questioner is the high performing SBU head of a large bank and we are in the midst of a coaching session.

"Rather I feel that teams are made up of a few strong links and the strength of a team diminishes significantly when it loses one of these strong links " he continues, "somewhat akin to a cricket team losing their Captain to injury or retirement."

My client has been a well-known sportsman in his younger days, when he played cricket at the national level and frequently draws analogies from his sporting days. Having a sports background myself, this approach strikes a chord and I enjoy his conversations.

"Nobody is indispensable," I state the obvious allowing him space to expand on his process of thought. "Most good teams should factor in plans for succession." I do realize that my client's conversation has taken this interesting twist as he has been recently promoted and is grappling with issues of finding a successor.



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"Yes, it's not difficult to find a successor who can fill his predecessor's shoes" he says. "The critical part is to discover whether the successor's style of functioning will continue to keep the team at the same high level. Will he bring his unique style to the team or prefer to continue functioning in the same manner as the previous person, even though it might be different from his usual behavior? In my career I have come across both types of individuals and it is tough to identify which method is more effective."

Reverting to the sports analogy, I ask him what would be the approach he would take for replacing a cricket captain. "That's simpler," he says "I would pick the person who can best ensure a smooth transition by maintaining the team harmony, employing a subtle combination of tact and firmness in his dealings particularly in the initial stages."

There is a lull in our conversation. I figure that he has thought about someone who could be a likely successor to his position. He next comment reinforces my reading of the position, when he says, "I wonder where the coach fits into the equation in succession planning?"

Wisely, I reserve my comments for our next coaching session.

(Read more on succession at Board level in this interesting article by Philip Beddows, founder of the Silk Road

Partnership.)

How often have you faced such situations? Do write in with your comments to kk@intradconsult.com

Partners@ISEC: Joining Silk Road Partnership !

In the 21st Century, we have travelled vast distances bridging two thousand years of perceptions of distance and scale by a series of continuously exploding technological advances. Airplanes, trains and roads; distribution systems that furnish ice-cool beverages in the midst of a vast, baking desert are taken for granted. Even so, nature with a flick of her skirt belies our pretensions to mastery. When you're in the middle of a scorching desert, there is only so much your air-conditioning unit can do. Coaches turn back before an approaching sandstorm. Trains are only as reliable as their rail-tracks' sandy foundations. And this is the twenty-first century!

Think back. How much more treacherous would travel have been along the 7000 mile Silk Routes two millennia ago? In the words of the, Faxian, traveling along it at the end of the fourth century, "*The only road-signs are the skeletons of the dead. Wherever they lie, there lies the road to India.*"

Such were the perils of voyaging along the Silk Routes, one of the world's oldest distribution systems. Over the centuries, many important scientific and technological innovations migrated to the West along the Silk Road. Resources, information and innovations were exchanged between so many cultures over so many hundreds of years that it is now often difficult to identify the origins of numerous traditions that our respective cultures take for granted. In this way, the Silk Road created an intercontinental think tank of human ingenuity.

Equally importantly, it was a commercial and cultural superhighway with many routes that connected Europe, the Middle East and Asia, incorporating what today's corporations call "EMEA" and "A-PAC".



While the Silk Routes brought great wealth to many who traded along it, for those travelling along its path whether by land or sea, it could be exciting and full of commercial opportunity, yet also full of unexpected events, steep challenges, twists and turns, not all of them welcome - in this way life on the Silk Road mirrors modern day careers and corporate life.

Continuing the legacy, the founders of **The Silk Road Partnership** are located along this superhighway connecting both ends of this great network. Headquartered in London and operating across Asia through their regional centers in The Gulf and India, it supports businesses and individuals in navigating their commercial and personal journeys with greater success, through coaching, mentoring and the development of talent and leadership. *ISEC is the India arm of the Silk Road Partnership. For further information about the Silk Road Partnership and the Founders, please visit www.silkroadpartnership.com*

Succession - Beyond Planning!

The successor to the top job has more to do than merely move offices, says Philip Beddows

Succession is not complete when a senior executive moves into a new boardroom role. The succession planning phase may well be over, but it is important not to fall into the trap of believing that the finish line has been crossed,

instead one has to think in terms of arrival at the blocks ready to run the race. But before one gets to that stage, the critical issue is whether the selection has been well made, with a multiplicity of factors all considered and weighed together in order to result in the best possible decision.

A talented individual cannot be selected for a role without consideration of factors such as how their selection will impact on the dynamics of the board and whether they are the right person for that role, in that particular organization, at that particular point in time. Like a thoroughbred racehorse, the corporate athlete must be primed for that particular race, pitched appropriately against the opposition of the day and run on a track that best suits them. Like world class athletes, there are countless examples of brilliantly talented CEOs who are clear favorites to succeed and who may enjoy early successes in the race they are running and yet are subsequently seen to fail at a later stage, and in some cases very soon after taking on a new role.

The reasons for failure can be many; for example, failure to use the appropriate executive search firm, lack of detailed due diligence and assessment and the challenge of transition and assimilation into the role. Soon after arrival a new CEO may be faced with an unexpected PR challenge, a sharp change of fortunes in a particular division, abrupt changes to the board resulting from resignation or illness, a bid from a private equity consortium, disquiet from institutional investors, a change in economic outlook that sees share prices falling across the market. These are the equivalent of Harold Macmillan's famous 'events, dear boy, events' that can throw even the best CEOs. Promoting an individual is not an exercise that can be completed in isolation – they have to be judged in the context of the team that they may lead, and the forward strategy of the company. If an internal candidate is likely, then it can be advisable to involve the services of a headhunter to benchmark that person against their peers in the market to identify any skills or suitability gaps and to ensure that a better candidate may not be sourced elsewhere. Succession by an internal candidate may seem to be a better option, but the internal candidate has similar challenges to a lateral hire and some that are unique. They have a brand and profile that has already been established.

Whatever the mood-music heralding the succession, a new home-grown CEO will inevitably wish to mark themselves out from their predecessor. No one likes to be thought of as anyone's clone, and that means that there will be some disappointed people who will suffer from the presumption of old friendships, behind which deficiencies may be hidden or ignored. CEOs are not appointed to build friendships; they are there to lead effective and market-beating boards in order to deliver shareholder value. For new executive board members there is no honeymoon period. Early delivery against objectives will help cement their succession, and positive external commentary will assist in raising confidence within as well as outside the organization.

Ironically, the arrival of a new CEO, whether internal or not, inevitably creates fresh succession requirements. Another internal contender for the role may be disappointed and their subsequent, almost inevitable, move to another company introduces the new leader to their first succession planning challenge and will set off a series of other moves in and close to the boardroom.

(This article was originally published in The Boardroom Magazine)



Philip Beddows, a Founding Partner of the Silk Road Partnership, is an experienced business coach and mentor based in London and works with senior executives and emerging leaders.

Coaching Notes:

How to use lessons about spaghetti in your coaching

By Lenny-Deverill - West - Howard Moskowitz, a food scientist, discovered 1/3 of Americans liked extra chunky spaghetti sauce.

To cut a great story short Howard tested lots of different types of Spaghetti sauce and after testing every conceivable type of sauce, Howard discovered that 1/3 of people liked extra chunky spaghetti sauce and that no other sauce company was servicing that need, by tapping into this gap in the market Prego, the brand he was working with, made \$600 million.

What stuck out for me was that spaghetti sauce companies always researched their product by asking people what kind of sauce they liked, but no one ever said they liked extra chunky sauce, even though it turned out a 3rd of people actually did. So the spaghetti sauce companies had always provided their customer with, what their research had told them they wanted.

And this is a bit like coaching, we ask the client what they want and we coach them to help them get it, but what if they are like people who thought they liked traditional spaghetti sauce because that's what they were brought up to believe spaghetti sauce should be like, but actually loved chunky spaghetti sauce? *Michael Neill is famous for saying that most people do not really know what they want, and are just ordering off the menu for what they think they can have.*

For example if you're coaching someone who would like a change of career, promotion or looking to start up a new business, are they talking about doing something that really lights their fire, that they'd love to do and would make a difference to people or are they talking about doing something that they think they can, something that is already on the menu and doesn't particular inspire them or make them happy?

I was talking to a colleague at work the other day and he mentioned that he wanted to build a career but did not know what he wanted to do. He mentioned that he was thinking or qualifying in carpentry, which is a great profession. Hell! We'll always need carpenters.

When I asked why he wanted to be a carpenter, he said 'he had looked at the local college prospectus and that was the only thing he thought he would be able to do', in other words he had looked at the menu and picked what he thought he could have.

I went on to ask him what was he good at, and what would he like to do with his one and only life? He explained he is just great at dealing with people, putting on events for the company he works for and after a short conversation he stopped for a moment and looked off into the distance and then said that in fact he'd love to run his own event management business, but has never thought it was even an option.

Howard Moskowitz says "The mind knows not what the tongue wants" but you could also say "the person knows not what they really because they're just looking at the menu of what they think they can have".

It also struck me that in order to find out what kind of spaghetti sauce 1/3 of people liked, Howard and Prego had to create it because it previously didn't exist, at least not on supermarket shelves.

So when you're coaching a client around a new career try and spot if they are just ordering of the menu, or is there something else that they would love to be doing? And go do that!

About the Author

Lenny Deverill-West is a Cognitive Hypnotherapist, NLP Practitioner, Coach and Corporate Trainer based in Southampton. For more information about Lenny Deverill-West visit www.startlivingtoday.co.uk.

With warm regards,

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Executive Coach & Founder-Director, ISEC

