

Is your professional knowledge stifling your growth as a leader?

This question surfaced yesterday with a client. We were talking about how to manage the situation and expectations when a new idea is floated at a team meeting. Is it better to air your reservations up front at the beginning? After all, if you have reservations because you've seen an idea like this before and it didn't succeed, you may think you're well placed to help course-correct in the interests of not repeating that previous scenario.

However, how you express your reservations is critical because you may send the signal that you're unsupportive of trying something new and different. If that becomes a pattern, you'll likely be seen as a sceptic, negative, not open to new ways of doing things. That could put your leadership journey at risk and you may not realise how your input is landing unless your CEO or team leader is open enough to tell you.

Consider that you can't know how this idea you're initially concerned about will play out this time. You're in a different organisation, context and professional environment from when you experienced that past version of the same idea.

Being able to balance validating a new idea, crediting whoever came up with it for their vision and drive to make something new happen, seeing what it might enable, despite whatever reservations you have based on past experience, is a critical skill in developing yourself as a leader.

You might ask, is it authentic to be open to blessing a new idea when you've got reservations? Good question, but the context is multi-layered and not black and white. Think about your team's culture and leadership style, what culture the leadership are trying to build beyond what's there now.

If fostering a can-do culture is a priority for the team leader, their goal may be to shift the team from a tendency to see problems first whenever a new idea is proposed, to a new mindset of seeing the bigger picture opportunities.

So - however well intentioned your concerns may be - the challenge is to try to see the possibilities and opportunities and focus more on those, then plan your response in service of that higher strategic goal for the team. Make it a conscious practice to keep your "normal" autopilot concerns on hold.

Think about successful examples of team meetings and adapting to change and new ideas. What made these successful?

When was it appreciated for concerns to be expressed in service of ensuring the new idea is sense-checked and as well prepared as it can be before significant time is spent on implementation?

So consider when concerns land effectively and are seen as a useful contribution rather than an inhibitor of innovation. Timing is important. Look at the whole cycle - from an idea landing on the table, through to ensuring clarity and understanding, alignment around the intended benefits, the needs the idea fulfils. Some points in the cycle will lend themselves more to raising your concerns, so plan and position them when they'll be seen positively as something helpful (i.e. thanks and so glad we didn't overlook that point).

Coming back to my original question about whether your knowledge stifles your growth as a leader, at the heart of this is how you relate to your past experience and knowledge. Seen one way, it is most useful when it offers a perspective to consider in the present situation, something in the background which you can reference and refer to, incorporate bits of, and leave others behind.

In this sense your past knowledge and experience can to some degree inform your course of action in the present, how you think. You can see it represents one way, not the only way. Like that, revisiting past experiences is helpful because it doesn't limit your options.

Past examples and experience have certainly provided us with useful learnings on how to do something better and differently in future. However they are not a blueprint for future success. So guard against being limited by your past experience and examples. They can all too easily become dominant in over-informing your options and chosen course now, like a back seat driver steering you involuntarily on autopilot even when you know another route would make more sense.

Whenever you spot this happening, the back seat driver sensation, gently thank your back seat driver for their input and let them go. That provides the space for you to take a fresh look at the problem, focusing instead on the current dynamics and needs of stakeholders, the team and situation of the organisation, rather than defaulting towards past solutions.

And if you do occasionally decide to copy a past approach, then make sure you've done it from a position of choice, based on conscious reflection in this particular case and not simply as a knee-jerk reaction.



Consider that your greatest days as a leader and your best contribution lies ahead of you. That's where growth is. However valuable your past experience is, restrain the impulse to look back over your shoulder and dine out on past triumphs. Focus instead on building the blank canvass of the future and how you can best populate it.

And with that, I wish you, dear reader, a happy summer break whenever and wherever you take it. Time in which you can truly disconnect and refresh. I thank you for reading my material and I hope it provides you with another perspective on your daily leadership challenges.

To find out how Live Your Performance Consulting Services can help you and your team reach what's important to you in your leadership challenges, reach out for an exploratory call [here](#).