

I met John C. at a very exciting time in his career. He was a 34-year-old regional manager of a global confectionery company preparing to step up to a larger role: regional general manager.

High achiever, excellent performer. His record ... it just wasn't something you see every day. He made his strengths even stronger, he spotted opportunity at every turn, leverage.

Despite his outstanding record, both his supervisor, Mark, and the human resources manager, Sue, were keen to go deeper into the distinctive emotional and social competencies that underpinned his performance.

It was puzzling, they told me, the sorts of things that happened on his sales teams. They seemed passive, and despite Mark reporting John C.'s top communication skills, some colleagues were less than "enthusiastic" about his leadership.

Does John C. have the emotional resources to maximize his advantages? What is he missing? This is where I come in. Despite his relative youth, John C. told me his signature strengths like the seasoned general manager he was striving to be:

"Driven, confident, self-regulating ..."

I tried to help him understand. I said, you know John C., your current performance, it,

"Why can't I get my management team to take ownership of projects?"

Yes, I understand. And do you feel that is a problem?

"... determination and passionate about what I believe in, a solid work-life balance ..."

I asked him questions to see if I could try and help him understand.

Do you have any doubts?

"Yes."

He had doubts. But with a team that was too "uptight and scared to take risks." He wondered, why? Why?

"Why don't my team open up to me?"

He could see so many opportunities, glimmering, laughing at him. That vision, that's how he made things happen.

"... possessing good technical, financial and marketing skills ..."

I tried to help him see how he comes across, how he appears. I suggested an assessment of emotional intelligence. Out of the blue, he opened up. He confided in me — he had noticed some people found him arrogant, egocentric even.

Such a negative impression. We explored the options; we needed objective data to try to answer some questions about his leadership style. Always remember, your primary role as a leader is to create emotional wealth for competitive advantage. He agreed and completed his EQ assessment, everything I asked of him, with characteristic enthusiasm. Verve even.

His impact? Engaging and pleasant initially, conveying extreme competency in adaptability, self-control, self-reliance, optimism, straightforwardness. His profile fit a leader best suited for 'start-up' and 'turn-around' situations.

"But I hate those ..."

No John. Sorry, please excuse me. No, John. We have here a picture of your capacities. What you don't understand is that I can help you. I can show you how to get the most out of your team.

"To make them?"

To make them, yes.

Your lowest scores: relationship skills and empathy.

"I am such a strong leader."

But you appear to be particularly bad at understanding and relating to the needs of others. Lets explore your profile, we can reshape your impact and appearance, to anything, even to this profile itself. I suggested to him that by presenting as competent, cool and tough-minded, with a thirst for pushing through any obstacle or challenge, he might be inhibiting his team.

"Sorry, what's that? Come again?"

Drive and determination are often likely to be misunderstood in these pushy conditions, I said again.

"He smiled instantly"

Who did?

"Oh sorry I do"

He smiled instantly. I continued to suggest, softly, that his quick decisive actions, though breathtaking to some degree, didn't speak plainly to his team, communication was stifled by him, there were details and information people feel aren't accessible to them.

"Bull in a china shop!" He was laughing. "That's what my wife often describes me as!"

In focusing relentlessly on driving people forward towards what are, admittedly, incredible targets, he could miss fully accounting for others viewpoints or feelings, for example. They can feel, I said softly, insufficiently listened to. He needed to allow for more time, more feedback, if he wanted to convince them to buy into his initiatives.

"I want to get the best. Out of them."

Unhurried interactions, I whispered. Improve listening and be more flexible with communicating. There's a style. There's rehearsal. Balance sharp criticisms with rewards and appreciation, reward your people.

John C. and I entered deeper conversation and he confessed that he didn't understand how to express his feelings, he felt hard to read, closed, he didn't know how to make himself appear otherwise.

This profile, I promised him, we can work with it. I looked him in the eyes. We can work with you. You are something we can rebuild.

REAL PERFORMANCE
Grace Phillips & Laurie Robins

Acting: Michael Filisky, LaTonya Grant
Acting Coach: David Newer
Camera: Matte Chi
Sound: Shirlyn Wong

Thank you: Bonny Adair, Geraldine Brennan, Nelsy Casallas,
Ron Clark, Lisa Dreykluff, Suzanne Esper, The William Esper Studio,
Pietro Pezzani, Angela Smith, Judith Waldmann

