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Don't Hesitate to Ask for Help

If you are to increase your problem-solving abilities, the first thing you have to do is to learn to admit to yourself and to others that problems do pop up along the way. Achievers often set out to accomplish something new – something that the world hasn't seen before – something that the rest of us aren't familiar with and sometimes not ready for yet. I believe that anyone who tries to accomplish anything extraordinary like this will undoubtedly run into trouble.

Many achievers, however, have a hard time admitting it when they run into difficulty. They often have an even more difficult time asking for help, because they equate this with failure. This attitude stems partly from the fierce need many achievers have to protect their personal integrity. They feel they have to do things their own way, and they don't want interference from others. That is partly why they prefer to solve all their problems on their own.

Nor do they want anyone to think that they aren't capable of solving their own troubles. They don't want to show any signs of weakness, because they believe that this will cause others to lose respect for them. They may even be afraid that in the long run, such a display of weakness can lead them to losing their positions.

This is why you hear so little in the business world about people experiencing difficulties. Business journalist Maria Carlshamre confirms this in her statement that "Not only Ericsson, but the entire business world, is characterized by a sort of backslapping boy's club mentality that makes it hard for people to admit to making mistakes or experiencing difficulties."

Yet it should be the most natural thing in the world for anyone in a leadership position sometimes to run into difficulties. Daring to discuss

your difficulties with others should be considered a strength. One of the best ways to move past obstacles is to get advice from someone who can see your situation from a fresh point of view. But this requires you, naturally, to admit that you are in the middle of something. At many work places, however, the atmosphere encourages competition in trying to appear carefree and in trying to demonstrate how great things are going.

It is important to remember that all of us have to face difficulty at different times – in both our professional and our private lives. It is a part of life. This is why we would all gain from greater openness.

Imagine, for instance, that you are experiencing troubles with your computer – who doesn't? Maybe you are too embarrassed to tell your colleagues about it. Perhaps you are afraid they might think that you aren't smart enough or that you are a slow learner. That might affect their attitude towards you, you think, and in the long run it might even have a negative impact on your career. So you tell yourself that perhaps it isn't such a good idea to tell them about your computer problems.

Unfortunately, however, this attitude can take a significant bite out of your effectiveness. If you don't get help with your computer problems, then you might end up stuck at your computer for hours or even days. It all depends on what kind of environment you experience on the job. Is it an environment that allows people to be open about their difficulties, or is it an environment that encourages people just to pretend to be cheerful all the time no matter what difficulties they are experiencing?

In today's business world, there has been a dramatic increase in the pressure to solve all your problems yourself. Each person is ex-

pected to handle his own matters without help. This is necessary, to a certain degree, if we are to meet market demands quickly and flexibly. There's just no time to go to your boss with every little thing. But if people are afraid of talking to each other about difficulties and challenges, this can in the long run be detrimental to their company.

There is much you can learn from others at work. Someone else there has almost surely experienced the same kind of trouble you are experiencing right now. I don't mean that you should go around talking about your every difficulty, or that everyone where you work should start sidelining as therapists. This isn't what I mean at all. But failure to acknowledge and discuss certain problems will prevent you from being able to do anything about them.

If we don't encourage such openness, then we might end up with a situation similar to the one that became prevalent in the old USSR, where everyone was afraid of telling the truth. Everybody lied and nothing was as it seemed. This lack of openness played its part in bringing this system to collapse. No one knew what was really going on.



If you are not encouraged at work to tell it like it is, you might actually find yourself in a situation similar to this one. And this can lead to catastrophe. It is therefore imperative for every business to encourage direct communication between its leadership and workers. It is important to discuss gains as well as losses. Usually, the people on the floor know much more about what is really going on than does the CEO. The CEO has to realize this and should be grateful for all open communication with his employees. It's quite natural that the people in regular contact with the customers or those who actually produce the company's products have a lot of valuable information about how the company is doing. They may very well be the ones who receive first indication of upcoming crises. Show me the CEO who wouldn't be grateful for this kind of information.

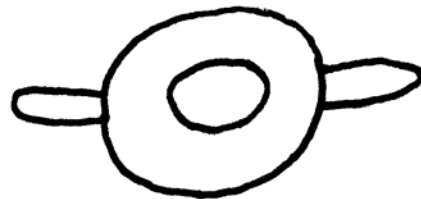
If the CEO doesn't know how things are going for the company or what's coming up around

the next corner, then you really are in trouble. Without accurate information, the decision-makers for the company cannot form accurate conclusions. Yet the people on the floor are often ignored. Unfortunately, they are seldom consulted about important decisions, yet they are supposed to be committed and involved.

Why is it this way? Are executives afraid of losing face? Are they unable to admit that, unless they talk to people from all the company's departments, there is no way for them to know about each little aspect of how their company is doing?

I think it's about time for CEOs to change their attitude in this matter. If they want their employees to take more responsibility, then they need to stop treating them like children. CEOs have to understand that people have to be treated as adults before they will find the motivation that leads to increased productivity.

That means that CEOs have to value the information their subordinates give them. In some cases, paying attention to such information may even be a matter of survival. To some degree, this has to do with the ability to build relationships on trust rather than on control. You can read more about this in the section on trust.



Can you open up your mind and see what this is? The answer can be found at the end of this section.

The kind of openness about difficulty that I am advocating here is not only discouraged at our workplaces, but also in our culture as a whole. To attain status or the respect of our peers in this post-industrialized era, we have to earn a lot of money. We have to own a big car, a big house and preferably even a big boat. We have to live glamorous lives with lots of parties and a multitude of friends. We have to eat exotic foods and drink exotic drinks, and the more expensive, the better. In this context, hardship just doesn't fit in. When asked how your life is going, you are only supposed to talk about how lucky you are and how successful your business is. Talk about difficulties and you are out. You don't fit in anymore. The party is over. You have every reason not to mention that a car just ran over your cat or that your grandmother is

seriously ill or that your husband would like to divorce you.



This kind of superficial lifestyle makes it only more difficult to cope with your challenges. It does not prepare you for adversity. It traps you inside a fantasy world where you pretend that hardship does not exist. It is a world in which you close your eyes and try to forget about all the beasts and dragons out there. Many of us did something similar when we were children. We used to play peek-a-boo. When mommy disappeared, we thought she was gone. We were frightened, but when she appeared again, our fear disappeared and we felt safe.

Unfortunately, as adults some of us try to do the same thing with the bad things in life. I'm sorry to say that it just doesn't work. The monsters don't disappear as soon as you close your eyes. They are still there, and they can still do their damage.

Does your work environment encourage openness?

When you run into trouble at work, do you dare to ask your colleagues for help?

When you grew up, were you able to discuss even bad things with your family?

Do you think it's easier for women than for men to be open about hardship? Motivate please.

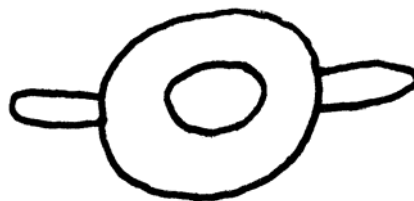
I think we have to learn to accept that adversity is a natural part of life. Finding ourselves trapped in difficulties is certainly nothing to be ashamed of. I think also it will prove helpful to reassess our view of what brings happiness. A happy life doesn't consist only of luxury, glam-

our and success. A happy life has to include some kind of change. Without change, we quickly get bored. Change, however, introduces uncertainty. You can never be sure of what dragons (maybe Puff) you will encounter around the corner if you leave the safety of your castle. In other words, a happy life also has to include a certain degree of uncertainty and therefore also a number of unplanned and unpleasant events.

You also have to remember that nothing is free in life. There is always a price to pay if you want to accomplish something. The sum of everything that happens to you includes pluses as well as minuses. There is no way to exclude every negative thing you encounter in life. You can, however, change your attitude towards the bad things that happen to you.

We also have to realize that there is not only one way looking upon happiness. There are many different views of what makes one happy. Not everyone wants a big car and a big house. This particular view of happiness is often encouraged by commercial interests. I think that we each must find our own kind of happiness. Following the mainstream definition of happiness will surely lead to unhappiness.

Most people who are happy usually talk about having something in life that they are striving toward – some kind of idea or goal. Adversity plays an important role in this context because without it, the struggle would be pointless. Life would be like an empty sack. Naturally, one important part of having a goal is to reach it some day, but that's not the whole story. Goals, with the time and effort it takes us in reaching them, also keep us occupied throughout our lives. It takes this long because of the adversity we meet along the way. But what would occupy our time if we didn't spend it struggling toward our goals? Would happiness? Joy? Pleasure? Laughter? Perhaps, but would any of these be enough to keep us satisfied? Somehow, I doubt it.



You have probably already figured out that this is a Mexican guy on a bicycle.