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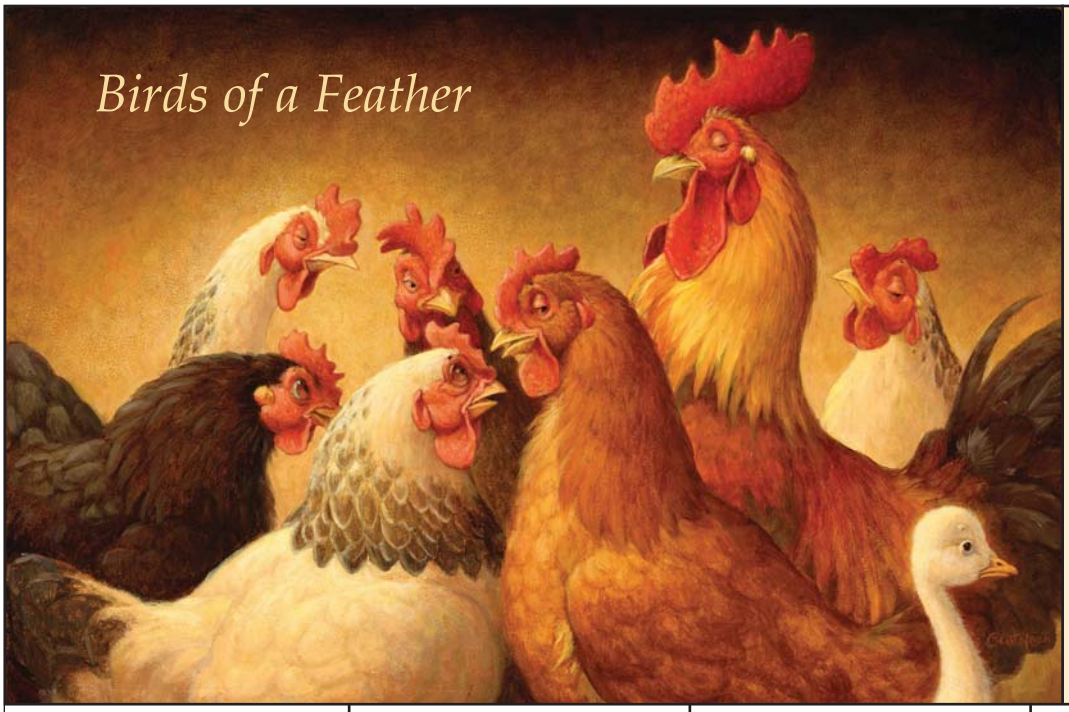

As leaders of a feather roost and flock together, they inevitably exclude some who just don't fit in (the oddballs, the ugly ducklings) not realizing that ugly ducklings eventually become beautiful swans.

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Pattern Recognition

Self-awareness as a development strategy.

by Ward Ashman and Teresa Roche

We often hear leaders disclose how they quickly and accurately identify trends via *pattern recognition*. They have a highly attuned instinct for anticipating trends and adjusting to them proactively. By observing the patterns of a situation, they require less analysis of facts—and less reaction time—thus *accelerating* decision making.

Another powerful area of pattern recognition is to observe your *personality* patterns to better anticipate how to respond to life situations. This enables you to adjust your default personality style and apply an improved response, especially in relationships. For example, if you recognize that you tend to react with irritation when you hear surprising or threatening news, you can choose a simple alternative—ask for more information by using a phrase like "tell me more," or "how so?" This probing gives you time to observe and manage your personality pattern, observe the internal state that drives it, and apply a better response. You often learn that your initial interpretation was inaccurate, and that added information helps you make a better decision.

Recognizing personality patterns to anticipate your responses drives an improved approach to all situations. How we live our life is what inspires others to follow us. Hence, we need to keep improving in observable ways in order to keep inspiring those who follow us to keep developing themselves. Ironically, as we move beyond the realm of technical competency to higher leadership, our ability to inspire becomes even more important in order to develop deep trust and resilience-based relationships. These relationships help us manage the challenges inherent to top leadership, via the platform of strong and creative teams.

Self-awareness via pattern recognition helps us inspire others by being at our best, not overreacting, and using our communication skills to respond effectively. As we show greater maturity in our relationships, we inspire others. And when we understand personality patterns, we can coach others.

To develop your personality pattern recognition skills, use this action plan:

1. Use the power of insight to analyze all your personality patterns and solutions to them. Insight provides both information and inspiration. To gain insight, start by asking others you trust to give you feedback.

2. Be objective. Your patterns are lifelong *mechanical* habits. The patterns don't change, but you can change how you respond to them, *particularly when there is an expensive downside cost*. This pattern analysis may be uncomfortable since you have to *identify and acknowledge your patterns*, but it will help you be more effective at everything you do.

3. Create a cost/benefit analysis. Determine your *key personality pattern*. Here are some common patterns based on the three primary orientations that people use to process information.

- *Logic oriented:* highly analytic; get rattled when things don't make sense; judge others for being irrational; high commitment to get the right answer.
- *Emotion oriented:* focus on the feeling aspects of relationships and situations; feel at best when in positive situations; strong need to assess how others feel; can get caught up in over-working to avoid one's own emotion state.
- *Intuition oriented.* Have a sense of knowing; can be impulsive, trusting the intuition, but can err by not trusting intuition and find out later it was right; and still require logic and emotion to confirm accuracy of perception.

Now think about the cost and benefit of your personality pattern to define the value proposition of your observable patterns. You may be surprised.

4. Determine your tool. Learn from your cost-benefit analysis and design your tool for handling your patterns.

- If you are *high assertive*, you can run over people impulsively and miss hearing important information. The benefit is that you get to the point quickly. The tool is to think about your impact before acting to get better information and waste less time.
- If you are *high analytical*, you can take too long to get to the facts. The benefit is an accurate assessment of key detail. The tool is to determine how much information is actually needed to accelerated decision making.
- If you are *high emotion*, you can be distracted with people issues that derail practical results. The benefit is that you can build a stronger foundation of community and resilience. The tool is to balance connecting with others and getting results.

You may know your effective tools, but you need to *remember* to use them.

5. See your blind spots. We all have them, and they are the key opportunity for improvement. Ironically, the people who know you best have been giving you feedback about these blind spots all along. However, we often don't listen to them. This is especially the case with those closest to us! Be diligent to learn about your blind spots and learn to see those patterns accurately. Reducing blind spot patterns is the fast way to self-improvement.

6. Observe traction. After applying your personality pattern recognition and tools, observe the positive results of your actions and use these as positive reinforcement. Observing traction reinforces your higher performance. When possible, let others know what development area you are working on and solicit feedback on how you are doing. As you become more conscious of your improvement, you'll see more opportunities. You can self-correct in the moment. Document the results of your improvements and use them to drive a higher focus on further results.

7. Apply action. Keep upgrading your tool kit and action plan. Drive your plan forward to keep improving and focus on constant improvement.

Self-awareness is the key to pattern recognition. Since how we live our life is what inspires others to follow and trust us, we have to keep improving in observable ways in order to inspire those who follow us to keep growing. LE

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ACTION: Use pattern recognition to develop.

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