



V. How relevant is character in business?

Every manager would immediately and without a doubt admit that character is relevant in business today. Still, the fact that they only measure performance in terms of turnover and profit proves otherwise. It seems we have some real apprehension in addressing the personal behaviour of our best performers. We don't want to demotivate these personalities, of course, or even go as far as losing them altogether. Besides, our business rationale might well remind us that these are the employees who are often the most profitable.

In my seminars, I regularly encounter delegates who confide in me about their issues with certain employees, who may be excellent at their job, but whom they struggle to trust. They feel that something is not quite right with the situation but find little to no understanding from other colleagues and wonders why this tricky situation is left unchecked within the organisation. This shows us that it is still unusual to coach people about their attitude or behaviour. Some managers might say that we should refrain from working on character altogether and (because they subscribe to the old-school business mindset), they will argue that this is the price we must pay to operate in a 'realistic business environment'.

We are all unique personalities with interesting character traits, but also flaws. We are human and therefore, not at all perfect, myself included. Is that, however, a valid reason to feel uncomfortable asking people to take responsibility for their behaviour? Probably not. Maybe we are so focused on results, that we think getting involved, and possibly being confronted by some strong personalities could well backfire on us.

Performance vs trust

In Simon Sinek's latest book, *The Infinite Game: How Great Businesses Achieve Long-Lasting Success*, he talks about the essential requirements for US Special Forces Navy SEALs recruits. The members of this force are assessed on two criteria: performance and trust. It goes on to say, that a high performer with a low trust attitude has been proven to be a serious risk to the force and its critical operations. This practice confirms that the performance and safety of this special operations unit depend entirely on character, that is, the ideal combination of personal performance and behaviour. It is interesting that this simple principle is endorsed in one area of society and but is only given minor importance in others.

When the next generation of millennial leaders come on board, they might very well expect us as the more experienced leaders, to deal with some of the character issues within our teams. As increased transparency continues to be a hot topic, the question of managing the consequences of certain behaviours will be difficult to avoid. At the same time, it will also be an important step towards creating a psychologically safe working environment in our teams and organisations. The current focus on addressing unconscious bias and inclusion are clear signs that we need to put more emphasis on attitude and behaviour.

Whether we address the behaviour of the people entrusted to work with us will mainly depend on our personal belief system. It will be hard to choose each time to give matters of trust priority over general performance. We must be convinced that we are doing the right thing in investing in personalities, or we simply won't find the time and space to do so. Over time, managing performance and fostering trust in others will become the two indispensable pillars of sustainable success. Not only because it is right and necessary, but because it is the most profitable thing we can do.

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