



The Advisory Alliance 60-Second Email™

Why Consistency Kills Careers ***August 30, 2007***

In this month's 60-Second Email™, we discuss the risk of remaining true to oneself.

My wife squeezes the toothpaste in the middle; I squeeze it from the bottom. And yet we're still married after 20 years. I was convinced of the validity of my approach given that the all-knowing people at Crest printed on each tube "For best results, squeeze tube from the bottom and flatten as you go up." Such proof was of little concern to my better half; she confidently remained a tube squeezer (and I a defiant tube flattener). My confidence and tenacity, though, were shaken recently when I observed on my tube of toothpaste (separate as to property works equally well in the bathroom) the statement: "For best results squeeze tube from the middle and flatten as you go up." Surely, it was a typo or a vicious practical joke from a disgruntled employee in marketing. My wife would have none of it; squeezers rule.

I am reminded of the famous quote from Emerson: "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds." It's likely that tube squeezing technique has little impact on the final dental outcome (*whether* you brush might just be a tad more important). And yet we often persist with an approach...better still, we tend to *cling* to an approach as if it was genetically wired into us, at times searching for any justification to preserve our consistency, and, perhaps, validate who we are. The same is true for leaders and managers in transition. Research continues to show that leaders and managers are at greatest risk when they advance from their present position and role to one of increasing scope and complexity. There are many reasons for failure during these transitions, including the failure to develop the appropriate skills and thinking required of the new role, and also the failure to let go of the "old" skills and thinking that are no longer relevant.

In his article "Pathways and Crossroads to Institutional Leadership", Freedman notes that successful leaders and managers come to feel confident in themselves and in their competencies. However the risk they face in remaining consistent during a transition to a more senior or complex role is extremely high: "They easily addicted themselves to those familiar responsibilities and their use of their familiar competencies. To let go of these reliable old friends--even when done with respect and appreciation--is easy to prescribe but difficult and threatening to do." In a very real way, to stay true to oneself is the most dangerous thing one

Better Business. Better Talent. Better Performance.SM

www.AdvisoryAlliance.com

© 2007 The Advisory Alliance, LLC. All Rights Reserved.



The Advisory Alliance 60-Second Email™

can do. Freedman calls for firm encouragement as well as individual support to facilitate the needed withdrawal and subsequent change.

Although I could easily squeeze the tube in the middle, I've always been a flattener. True, it's only toothpaste, but it does highlight a fundamental choice for leaders and managers in business and other domains: Would you rather be consistent with who you've been or who you need to be?

The popular quote from the 6th century BC Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu is most appropriate: "When I let go of what I am, I become what I might be."

You can access this and previous 60-Second Emails™ via this link to our website:
<http://www.advisoryalliance.com/newsletter.php>

Until next month,

David

David Harper
Managing Principal
धारपर@advisoryalliance.com

Better Business. Better Talent. Better Performance.™

www.AdvisoryAlliance.com

© 2007 The Advisory Alliance, LLC. All Rights Reserved.