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Feedback is key to being effective leader

WOMEN AT WORK

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Leadership, at its heart, is a relationship with followers. If you want to fully engage, connect with and inspire followers, you must be wide awake to your impact on others.

This sounds simple enough, but is, in fact, a challenge somewhat akin to trying to drive a car without the benefit of rear- and side-view mirrors. That is because there are two perceptions of you. The first is how you see yourself, while the second is how others see you. Together, they affect your ability to influence, so it's crucial to uncover any disparities or blind spots between the first and second perceptions.

For example, leaders who see themselves as thoughtful and deliberative may be perceived as indecisive or lacking vision if they take too long to make a decision.

Supervisors who pride themselves on attention to detail may be experienced by their direct reports as micro-managers.

In both cases, qualities that are strengths are being overused and have become weaknesses.

The most effective leaders and aspiring leaders cultivate extreme self-awareness by regularly seeking feedback through:

Straightforward conversations. Seek opportunities with colleagues to improve your performance. Try asking the boss, "What one thing would most improve my effectiveness?" Ask team members or direct reports, "What do you need from me to work at your best?"

Assessments. Avail yourself of the variety of assessment tools available that provide rich insights on your behaviors, strengths, leadership qualities and personal brand.

360 interviews. Arrange to have interviews with those who work with you and for you conducted by a coach or other trusted outside party.

Use the feedback you've gathered to create a personal development plan that enables you to shape a vital third perception: how you want to be seen.

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