

The Three Massive Mistakes Made by Talented Leaders and Professionals

By Jennifer Selby Long

Over the past 20 years, I've seen talented professionals who flourished during good times and bad, as well as those who didn't. Here are the three massive mistakes with the worst consequences, based on my direct observation during the past four downturns and their subsequent recoveries:

1. *Under the gun, they stop adapting to others and don't have any idea that they have done this.*

Once you stop adapting to others, your utility to the organization goes down, since others experience you as more difficult to work with and then choose to work with other talented individuals when possible.

This takes form in three ways: not asking enough questions, projecting negative attributes on to others that aren't really there, and holding steadfast that "your way is the right way."

The fact that you are talented can actually create a self-defeating dynamic, because stressed employees naturally turn to you for quick decisions, but not every decision should be instantaneous or made without input from the involved parties, tempting as that may be.

2. *They stay in their current role and work hard doing what is assigned to them.*

They work harder and spend no time communicating the results and value they add to the organization to anyone except (maybe) their own boss.

The urge to hunker down would logically lead to this behavior. However, the more you hunker down, the fewer people know your contribution to the company and can advocate on your behalf during promotion and new assignment decisions.

If your boss is the only one who knows your value and then he or she leaves the company, or is just a poor advocate, you will find yourself in a risky position. In fact, a key factor leading to a career plateau is being too closely tied to your boss' coattails.

3. *They put their growth and development on the back burner, limiting their current and future opportunities.*

Meanwhile, savvy peers took charge of their own development and offered up their newfound skills as yet another reason to keep them on board and in the most interesting assignments. Note that “savvy” doesn’t necessarily mean “talented” but this is one area where street smarts out perform book smarts.

It’s essential to take charge of your own growth. My clients certainly are. The greatest growth area in my business is from talented individuals who want to direct their own growth and whose companies stopped investing in people during the downturn. While others just decided to wait around until their employers started investing in them again, these clients gave themselves an extraordinary edge by investing in their own growth.

Avoiding these three mistakes is easier than you think. It does take some effort, and *you’ll have to exit your comfort zone* (you know the zone – it’s where your IQ and talent can solve almost any problem!) but it’s not complicated.

In the next three issues, we’ll look at the four things you absolutely must do to avoid these three massive mistakes and be among the first to thrive in the recovery.

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