

Traveling Light Newsletter

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Welcome to the second edition of Traveling Light, Selby Group's free monthly newsletter. Traveling Light© is a newsletter exploring how those blessed with the talent and opportunity to lead can be more effective and lighten the load inherent in their lives, based on the work of management consultant Jennifer Selby Long. Copyright 2007 Jennifer Selby Long. All rights reserved.

Quick tips for lightening your load

- Looking to show your appreciation for an employee? Save yourself time: ask directly how he or she likes to be recognized. Sounds awkward. Works beautifully. The downfall of many well-intentioned reward programs is that they reflect how their authors like to be rewarded, which may have little similarity to how your employee likes to be rewarded. Just ask my deeply introverted colleague back in our Amoco days. She declined a \$1000 award (a rare thing for oil company employees in 1990) because it involved walking across a stage in front of several hundred people to receive a certificate. The money just wasn't worth it.
- Thinking maybe you should show your appreciation a little more often, but don't have the time? One of my clients came across an unopened box of thank-you notes when packing up his office to move to another building. Instead of packing them, he dusted them off, sat down, and quickly jotted off a note of thanks to each direct report, noting work they had done and how it positively impacted the customers or company. Normally a very particular man, he didn't have time to worry about forming perfect messages or even getting the spelling right. His team was stunned, and happy, and no one noticed misspelled words or complained that his praise wasn't as eloquent as his executive briefings. The vibe lasted for weeks. A ten- minute investment with a multi-week reward. Now that's what I call Traveling Light.
- Do you have the opposite challenge - you need to give negative feedback to an overly sensitive employee? Start with the right mindset. Feedback that helps a person grow and improve is a *gift*, even though it may not feel like it in the moment. Why would you withhold information that could help him or her make better-informed choices? Make your feedback specific to behaviors you can see, don't try to guess at his or her internal mindset or feelings, take a deep breath, and give it your best go. Sensitive employees will only fall behind if you let their fragility stop you from telling them what they need to know in order to grow and keep pace with their thicker-skinned peers.

Beware the Life Coach Who Offers to Help You Fulfill Your Dreams

What on earth is happening out there? When I attend professional association meetings and am routinely assaulted by "life coaches" trying to pitch me as a client, I wonder if the professional world has gone slightly mad. Now I know this does make me sound solidly middle-aged, but I was doing executive coaching before it had a name. When on earth did it morph into "life coaching" and take on this strange, frothy form? Good grief. It's just embarrassing.

These days, you'll have to pierce through a lot of noise in the system to get to a good coach whether of the career, leadership, or personal variety. I know, because I am always trolling for affiliates to join my team. For what it's worth, here are the minimal criteria I think you need to use. I use them myself when screening candidates.

Screen without any hesitation for ALL of the following:

1. *Good personal chemistry and a sense of trust.* Done right, coaching of any variety will quickly put you in some very vulnerable and occasionally uncomfortable places (sorry!). You must be able to trust the coach both personally and in terms of his or her professional competence. If you can't let down your guard with the coach, you won't grow. A "maybe" should always be a "no." If you don't feel good chemistry and a gut-level sense of trust in your first meeting, move on.
2. *Substantial demonstrated results.* Has the coach worked with others at your level and in similar professions? What goals did these clients have? Were these goals similar to yours? If so, what results did they achieve? Some might blab on about how results are hard to define. That's nonsense. Don't waste your time with anyone who can't demonstrate results with clients who are in some meaningful way similar to you.
3. *Availability.* A coach should be available to you, and not just during prescribed meeting times. Everyone learns differently. Not everyone grows best through weekly one-hour structured meetings. It's a relatively personal relationship, but a business one between peers first and foremost. As such, I expect coaches to take calls between appointments and from time to time after the official coaching process has been tied off. Some of my clients don't even set appointments any more. They call me when they need me. If a potential coach squirms at this idea, it makes me wonder why he or she can't better manage time, client expectations, and fee schedules.
4. *Speed.* Unless you drag your feet, you should be able to experience some progress and personal improvement within the first 1 - 2 weeks after the initial assessment is complete, in some cases sooner. Coaching is not therapy, and no coach should assume that it will take months for you to show any improvement at all. The only thing that improves with that attitude is the bank balance of the coach.

5. *Strategic focus on strengths, and not just because Marcus Buckingham made it trendy and cool.* We lead from our strengths, and studies had proven this years before *Now, Discover Your Strengths* hit the bookstores. A good coach helps you figure out how to better leverage and develop your strengths in order to make progress toward your development goals. He or she will also help you figure out how to manage or improve your weaker areas, but your weaknesses shouldn't be where you spend all of your coaching time, or even most of it. Now if I could only convince some of my clients of that...

These items are completely discretionary, depending on your interests and needs:

1. *Age and Gender.* If you want someone your own age (or older or younger, for that matter), it's o.k. to ask for what you want. Likewise, if you believe you would feel significantly more comfortable working with one gender over the other, seek out what you want, and curb any feelings of guilt that you might be ageist or sexist. It's more important that you be comfortable enough to be open than to be politically correct. Your coach is an objective outsider, not an employee. Clients always apologize profusely when they call to ask for a male coach, but I never take it personally.
2. *Industry knowledge.* As much as we all like to think that our companies, roles, and industries are unique, the truth is that the majority of leadership challenges are similar across industries. Industry experience can help some people feel more comfortable with their coaches from the onset, but consider the counterargument -- the less industry experience, the less likely you are to learn that your coach is also developing your direct peer at your direct competitor.
3. *Broader consulting or management experience.* In my own experience, I have found that the best executive coaches have a great deal of other business experience and do not dedicate 100% of their time to working as coaches. This gives a broader perspective, but that may or may not be important in your particular situation, particularly if your development goal is of a personal nature.

When it comes to career coaching, you're swimming in some mighty strange waters these days. So strange that career coaching deserves its own spotlight in this article. If you seek coaching in anticipation of a big career move, you could experience a strange irony: your so-called career coach could do damage to your career.

Career coaching has become a popular field, along with its sidekick, resume writing. There are no barriers to entry, with the extreme variations in quality that you might expect under those circumstances.

Gone are the days when you could count on your career coach to have a graduate degree in career counseling and years of experience. You absolutely must ask for and check credentials of anyone claiming to be a career counselor.

The worst are the career coaching services that charge thousands of dollars to provide executives and aspiring executives with a "marketing director" to write your resume and tell you how to pitch yourself. There's certainly some quality to be found out there, but mostly I come across expensive junk. For example, I recently blasted two of those resumes to bits and it was a shocking but much-appreciated experience for the clients, both of whom had previously worked with me on projects. I charged a whopping \$0.00, a substantially better price than the executive career coaching services had charged. These "marketing directors" had absolutely no idea what executives value, how they think, or what would make a candidate attractive to them. The resumes were full of false bravado and hot air and did not in any way reflect the fine personalities and genuine executive potential of the candidates.

Your resume is your calling card. It's your voice to prospective colleagues, and it impacts your reputation before you've even had a chance to make one in person. Don't hand the responsibility for your voice to a near-stranger. In this arena, I know of no way to take a shortcut that doesn't shortchange. Do the hard work of writing your own resume, and give it to trusted colleagues and advisors for feedback. You can't travel light on the front end of a job search, but you sure can save yourself months of delays and wasted time later by doing the hard work now.

If you've personally used an outstanding executive-level resume writing service, I'd love to hear about it. For now, though, my recommendation is this: resume writing services may be helpful for individual contributor jobs or for those who struggle a great deal with English - although I have my doubts -- but proceed with extreme caution if the hiring manager for the job you want has a title that starts with Partner, Chief, or Vice-President.

News

Congratulations to former Selby Group Affiliate John Cronkite, who has recently accepted a position with the Stanford Graduate School of Business. John will serve as a full-time Leadership Coach. He will be directly involved in developing the leadership curriculum, coaching second-year Fellows who will be teaching first year students, and facilitating interpersonal dynamics courses.

The International Association for Psychological Type conference in Baltimore (www.apinternational.org) July 11 - 15 will be dynamite. I'll be conducting a workshop there on July 14 on the impact of gender and psychological type on financial behavior, and how to use heightened self-awareness to make better-informed financial decisions. Our study has grown to 456 participants and counting. The latest study results will be presented

at the workshop. If you can't make it, and you've requested updates on the Wealthy Types study, you will receive an updated report after the conference. If you haven't signed up to receive updates but want them, just shoot me an email at jennifer.selby@selbygroup.com and I'll add you to the list.

Sharon Richmond will also be speaking at the conference on the results of the study she did with Julie Brown and Pam Fox Rollin exploring leadership, psychological type, and emotional intelligence. Many of you participated in both Sharon's study and mine. Thank you! We literally couldn't further knowledge in this arena without you.

Many thanks to the eagle eyes who pointed out a bizarre sentence structure and a wayward apostrophe in our last issue. We know some technical confusion caused the first error, and we hope we have straightened it out in this one.

A Blinding Flash of the Obvious

I would like to extend a warm welcome to Janet Smith, our new assistant, and to Laurie Bjork, our new bookkeeper. True confession: after all the times I advised you, Dear Clients, to delegate and stop trying to do so much, I myself completely neglected to do so. Were it not for Janet and Laurie, I would still be trying to be all things to all people, and you wouldn't be receiving this newsletter. Thank you, Janet and Laurie, for stepping up to the plate so quickly.

When my father-in-law passed away late last year, we suddenly found ourselves buried in the administration of a trust and handling my mother-in-law's day-to-day financial affairs, in addition to our own bills and the endless paperwork of a small business. Saturdays became a much-dreaded paperwork day. Yuck.

Somewhere along the line, I decided to stop dreading and start delegating. Perhaps the most embarrassing revelation has been that both Janet and Laurie do the tasks twice as fast as I had done them, not only saving me time, but also money and my personal sanity. And - now this one really blows my mind - they really do enjoy doing what I hated doing. Amazing.

This month's blinding flash of the obvious: you can't travel light if you're carrying a heavy load. Get something off your back, however large or small. Somebody else will probably do it better, anyway.

Thanks also to all of you who expressed your appreciation for the newsletter last month. It made my day.