

food for thought proud of your actions?



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If I asked you when you were last proud of how you acted what would you say?

This 'traveller's tale' got me musing about pride, and how much it can contribute to our actions.

A gung-ho adventuress my friend Victoria is not, but on holiday in Jordan she found herself carefully negotiating the same perilous cliff paths that featured in the film Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade.

Walking in the footsteps of the film's hero, Victoria shot nervous glances down plunging ravines also – she's not a great one for heights and so came the point where she felt she couldn't continue. For this explorer, no matter how persuasive the guides, or how many people had gone before, there was no holy grail to be had by crossing a bridge that was way too rocky in all kinds of ways.

Victoria's young daughter Becky was nervous too but she was determined to get across. She's reasoned that this part of the route was no more difficult than earlier challenges: rocks to clamber over and around, steep and demanding trails. More to the point, her younger brother had sought the safety of a ride on one of the guide's donkeys, and she wasn't going to give him the satisfaction of getting across without her!

After a mum-daughter chat Victoria was persuaded that if Becky could traverse this part of the cliff, then she could too. In a matter of minutes Becky had become a role model for her mother. They each made it to and fro over the bridge and the experience wove itself into the memories of the trip to Wadi Rum.

Months on, and as Victoria regales the story she is still rightly proud of the 'Indiana moment'.

I think this is good kind of pride, albeit borne out of Becky's literally childish pride not to be beaten by her brother!

Pride around everyday more pedestrian challenges might simply be to get something done, nail that business project, organise the team. Or perhaps pride is/can be about people... firing up enthusiasm, maybe; or stopping something inappropriate.

It's natural to want to feel proud of what we do and the actions we take. To those who counter that pride is one of the seven deadly sins, I say, true but that's more about hubris or

arrogance. In this context the poet Dante's definition was 'self-love perverted to hatred and contempt for one's neighbour'.

According to sociologist Erving Goffman, pride is what makes us go to extreme lengths to avoid embarrassment. Here, then, it's a spur, a means of keeping our eye on the performance ball.


Daniel Goleman reinforces this in his book Social Intelligence, describing pride as one of the inner police emotions. 'It encourages us to do what others will laud, while shame and guilt keep us in line by serving as internal punishments for social misdemeanours'.

He tells the story of a basketball coach who in the heat of a tense and important match, sent in a 'six-foot-three, 250-pound giant' to commit 'hard fouls' – hurting people on the other team. One of these fouls sent an opponent to hospital with a broken arm and kept him out of the game for the rest of the season.

The basketball coach took immediate action. He suspended himself from coaching, saying he was 'very, very remorseful'.

If you're not proud of your actions, they will make diddly-squat difference to boosting your performance. If you're going through the motions, you're unlikely ever to get beyond 'average', and maybe you won't even get that high...

To be proud of our actions in a way that relates to performance, whether in business or personal life, we need to plan what we want to achieve and how we'll achieve it in a good way. At work, for example, maybe you want to maximise your impact, improve your effectiveness, generate pace and urgency, help others adapt to change, bring about team cohesion and collaboration, or create new approaches to old problems.

These are some of the most common challenges around which I'm asked to coach. My clients are proactive, if stuck; lost in a fog of conflicting priorities and discombobulating needs. They want to know, 'how do I achieve...?'; 'how can I improve...?'; why do I feel...? 

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If there is a common denominator for why people need coaching it's that they seek clarity. It's my job to ask the powerful question; to challenge in a positive way, to be empathic, to help my client realise they know the answer – they just don't know what it is yet. The work helps people become better at what they need to do – coaching helps good leaders become great. It enhances awareness of your strengths and weaknesses, allowing you to focus on your strengths and to be OK with not being the perfect all-rounder.

This conundrum most frequently rears its head when someone has been promoted and has new responsibilities. One client of mine was a newly appointed Director and wanted support for how she would manage her place in her team, and the style in which she would lead it. She wanted to establish a future role as a leader of her large organisation.

Her team's challenges were varied... expansion was a key objective and growing pains would be an immediate issue for managers grappling with the need to work differently. Our coaching work together focussed on core needs - establishing the optimum style for managing a growing department; work-life balance; support for building a five-year strategy; and planning how my client would evolve as a role model for the senior management teams.

What helped this executive find her place was work

around authentic leadership; this helped her define her own style of leadership, and put her own stamp on her territory.

If you don't have a coach and are stuck, here are three steps you can take to improve your personal standing - all the more important in these credit crunch times.

Ask yourself, are you just ticking over, or seizing opportunities to do even better?

Now do these three things:

- Define the level at which you are currently performing
- Raise your performance bar – aim to be better, and refocus on what you really want to achieve
- Now you've raised the bar, think about how you're going to jump it... what difference can you make to your own, and to your team's performance and contribution?

Victoria raised the bar in Jordan by seeing her nine-year-old daughter as a courageous role model, and sharing her pride in tackling a scary situation.

The basketball coach raised the bar by recognising he'd got the wrong sort of pride, focused entirely on winning even if it meant physical harm to the opposing team, and potentially, his own players.

So, when were you last proud of how you acted? And what will it take to make you feel proud of your performance?



how to implement...

... some of tactics suggested here

executive coaching

An executive coach will help you get to the heart of your leadership challenges and provide a safe, confidential environment in which to honestly discuss business-critical issues. This is the first step towards superior leadership performance that will ripple through your organisation.

micro-coaching

Ideal for people who need to shine a spotlight on a sticking point - and don't want to spend hours doing it. TSOC coaches understand the power of a single question to help highlight what is holding you back. In just a few minutes you'll benefit from a friendly, professional sounding board; objectivity, and distance from your challenge; techniques that will help clear the fog.

team development

If you lead people who display some of these traits, consider a programme of individual coaching and, where appropriate, team development. For example, a psychometric will establish individual types or working preferences; and this work can be complemented with a tailored team event designed to improve key elements such as understanding of each other's strengths and weaknesses, and communication effectiveness.

Feel free to call or email me for a conversation as to how we can help you turn leadership theory into your own best practice.