

## BE YOURSELF

**O**ne of my top team is reeling from the raft of development opportunities before her. She's been attending sessions with voice power and communications specialists at the Central School of Speech and Drama, where she's learnt to practise breathing techniques while driving, yawn a lot – a great way to warm up the voice – and to strive to glide through life rather than settle for the natural 'jabber' she is.

That's not all. She recently left a presentation by leading athletics coach Frank Dick not so much inspired as driven. He had been talking about the differences between mountain people and valley people. Valley people, Frank explained, make excuses: 'A draw is a good result'.

There's nothing wrong with this if you're content being a valley person. As Frank Dick says, no risk means less chance of a mistake. But my colleague sought reassurance she is seen as a mountain person. The sports coach described these as challenge seekers: 'They climb a mountain so that next time they can climb a bigger one'. As he said, without risk there is no progress.

Momentarily weary from so much self-imposed self-improvement, my colleague made an interesting comment: 'Too much development and you could lose track of the real you'. In today's business environment, professional development is required, applauded and rewarded. If we are serious players, of course we achieve business targets and personal development plans. And we have to be seen as a person who has developed and grown.

Frank said something else, which resonates with my experience: 'Just be better at being you and you'll always touch your mountain tops'. Yes, seek out challenges to be better, but be careful not to lose the original you in the process.

Say, suddenly you're a leader and



In this era of CPD, we rightly set a lot of store by self-improvement. But it is possible to change too much. **Lyn Bicker** warns never to lose sight of who you really are

people look to you to make a decision, set direction and enthuse everyone – a tall order for most people. It'll be an exciting time – and probably a daunting one. And in a quiet moment of self-doubt, you might well wonder why anyone would want to be led by you.

There will be a temptation to think you need to become a different person in order to become a leader. Hiding behind an alter ego is a refuge for many an introvert individual – actors and journalists, for example, are often shy.

To the executive coaching clients I've worked with who, on promotion, have quietly expressed a sliver of doubt about their ability, I have said this: you got to this position because other people think you are the right person for the job. Not the person you might be, but the person you are now.

There is a huge difference between creating a 'new' you and developing yourself as a rounded leader and manager. Integrity is at the crux of the matter. To command the respect and motivation that makes people follow you, you need to nurture a climate of trust where wholehearted commitment has a chance to flourish.

### QUESTION OF TRUST

Hypocrisy or duplicity can destroy trust. So as leaders and managers we need to be genuine on professional and personal levels. When making decisions we need to return to the values we choose to live by, to stick

by the commitment we make. Of course this isn't easy and we make mistakes, but making consistently value-led and fair decisions will position us as trustworthy. When people trust you, they'll follow, even if they disagree with your decision.

When we start out in management our skills need to be pretty level. The further up the ladder we go, the more we must develop our ability to recognise our own areas of weakness. We need to find people who have talent in those areas, to give them responsibility – and the glory – for achieving joint goals. True leaders are those who are secure within themselves. Their strength of character makes them confident about making and learning from their mistakes, they trust others and help other people develop their skills.

So in developing yourself as a good leader and manager, any old 'training' won't do – and too much of the right development might even dim the individual sparkle that makes you who you are. If you ever find yourself in a self-development spin, I suggest a step back, some effective breathing exercises – they really do work – and a frank conversation with someone you implicitly trust. That will soon bring you back to yourself. ■

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Too much professional training can blind you to your true personality