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Employer's Advantage

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From Jim Sirbasku's Desk

A New Year's Plan: A New Year's Plan: "To See Ourselves as Others See Us"

Two hundred years ago, when poet Robert Burns penned the words about seeing ourselves through the eyes of others in his famous poem (*To a Louse*, 1786), he could not have known that they would apply so fittingly today. Today's economy might be very different if only the leaders running some of our most respected organizations were willing to view themselves through the lenses others use.

In this new year, we must deal with an uncertain national and global economy. It is a good time for us to reassess our priorities and goals. Instead of looking in the mirror and reflecting on whether the hair is combed or the jacket fits well, a wise leader will look beyond the outer image, go beneath the surface. He will evaluate and look inside his true self.

Viewing our deeper selves and honestly recognizing what we see is a difficult task. Getting to the truth will require the help of others, perhaps many others, since some people know only one side of us. Deciding what we are going to do with the information we get back will require help, too, because it is easier to make no change. If you are tempted to think that way, remember: change is the only way to grow.

So, facing two paths – CHANGE and NO CHANGE – let's say we opt for the first one. What will keep us on the straight and narrow path? Here is a plan that can enable change:

- **Seek feedback.** The only way to know how others view us is to ask. Getting their input can tell us where we are now, which is an important step in getting where we want to go. Honest feedback illuminates our current state and provides a foundation for our betterment.

In addition to seeking out trusted friends and mentors, it is helpful to learn from the people you interact with on a regular basis. How do you treat those who can neither hurt nor harm you, like the clerk at the convenience store? The answer could be revealing.
- **Be courageous.** Whether or not you believe in making resolutions for the new year is immaterial. If you discover that you behave in ways that make it difficult for others to do their jobs, you have a responsibility to change your behavior. The alteration might be as simple as communicating in person instead of through memos. Or it might be more complex, requiring you to restructure the way you and your management team do business. Remember that embarking on such a course implies to those who take the journey with you that you are serious about change. To request feedback is not easy, but to seek it and then do nothing invites cynicism.
- **Do not assume anything about your employees.** Know them better than they know themselves. New tools are available to tell you exactly who is working for you – their competencies, their weaknesses and their goals. Do not decide that you can apply the same management style to everyone and get the same results. A multitude of different faces greet you when you walk into the department. They are likely to include four different generations, both genders, and different races and ethnicities. In the global marketplace, you will find variations even within identifiable groups. It is imperative

(continued)

"Inside my empty bottle I was constructing a lighthouse while all the others were making ships."

– Charles Simic, Serbian-American, former poet laureate.

"Nothing so conclusively proves a man's ability to lead others as what he does from day to day to lead himself." – Thomas J. Watson Jr., former president of IBM

that you learn what skills your employees have, the skills they are capable of acquiring and what it takes to keep them motivated.

- **Stay focused.** Pledges you make to yourself come with a tempting reality: If you made them, you can also unmake them. The consequences of straying off-course can be daunting, however. One of the biggest is inertia that permeates your organization. If you start something you don't finish, who will keep others focused? Create an accountability system. Make a list and read it at regular intervals. Or go a step further and give your list to a trusted peer to review with you regularly. Think of your colleague's reminders as a pep talk.
- **Recheck midyear.** In today's fast-changing world, a goal that's only a few months old can quickly become obsolete. Examining each item on your list after six months will let you know whether you need to stay the course or readjust. Of course, you may have seen some flaws in your accountability plan and made changes accordingly. Remember that the creation of new goals does not have to wait for a new year. You can set goals anytime. Build a new list as necessary depending on what has happened inside and outside the organization.
- **Manage frustration.** Realists know there are some things they will never change. Smart leaders recognize obstacles and adapt their responses when difficult changes are beyond their

control. Keep this in mind whenever you feel caught between harsh choices.

- **Know your limits.** Sometimes achievers forget that no one is perfect. Just as an artist is never done with his creation, each of us is still a student of life and a creation in progress. This is not permission to remain static, but we don't need to consider ourselves failures, either. Take the middle path: Admit your mistakes and resolve to do better.

As we commit to improve our leadership behavior in the coming year, we must remember that discomfort accompanies important change. But if we do nothing, the return will also be nothing.



*Jim Sirbasku, CEO
Profiles International*

"The leadership instinct you are born with is the backbone. You develop the funny bone and the wishbone that go with it." – Elaine Agather, banker and chairman of Chase, Dallas

PRODUCT FOCUS: Plan for the Future with CheckPoint 360^o™

A story told by former President Jimmy Carter illustrates the reality of life going on no matter what. He recalled a holiday visit with his family to an Aspen mansion that a Saudi prince, who was a friend of Carter's, owned. It was atop a mountain and the family had great fun. One day one of Carter's grandchildren asked him if he was going to die one day.

"Yes," Carter told him, "everyone dies." When his grandchild fell silent, Carter asked him what prompted the question. The grandson asked if he could still come to the prince's house once Carter died.

This story is a vivid lesson of looking to the future while remembering the past. This truth that applies to organizations during harsh economic times. Will we stick our heads into the sand like an ostrich until the storm passes, or will we face challenges bravely? We can successfully endure challenges if we retain and develop our best employees and encourage them to find creative ways to perform their jobs.

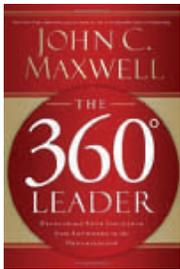
It's helpful to remember that even in a dismal economy, your most talented people might be tempted away by seemingly better situations. Whether key workers are worried about the organization's future or their role in it, you can address the worry with an assessment especially designed to discern where your

organization is now and where it needs to go. This useful tool is called CheckPoint 360^o™, and it will help you answer these questions:

- What strengths of this manager can I capitalize on?
- Which areas should my manager focus on developing?
- How can I provide guidance in this area?
- How do I effectively manage conflict?
- Do I have enough leaders in the pipeline to meet tomorrow's needs?

CheckPoint 360^o™ employs 70 interview questions about specific management behaviors to give a complete picture of a manager's capabilities in such areas as communication, leadership, adaptability, ability to build relationships, managing tasks, productivity, development of others, and self-development. Profiles' clients have used CheckPoint 360^o™ to help them grow effective leaders, build their talent bench, guide leaders through career transitions, develop top talent, and use leadership development to enact key changes in the business.

All things change, but commerce continues even when times are tough. Call Profiles at (800) 406-0087 to help ensure your top performers are going up – at your place of business.



BOOK REVIEW: How to Be THE All-Around Top Leader

When the leaders of an organization are the kinds of people everyone wants to follow, so much the better for the growth of the organization. The author of THE 360 DEGREE LEADER believes that even those who are not in the top spot of a company can lead.

Whom should they lead? For starters, their peers, their managers and those in lower positions. Or as author John Maxwell says: across, up and down. Here's a glimpse of his philosophy:

When leading up: Lead yourself first. Share the boss's vision. Demonstrate that you know the job is not all about power and glamour. Others might turn up their noses at the dirty work, but you tackle it. Even though your job does not offer all of the appearances of being at the top, you can still act like a leader.

When leading across: Are your actions and your conscience more important to you than cutthroat competition? Then be a friend. Listen to your peers so that they will reciprocate when you need to tell your ideas to someone you trust. Be honest. Make yourself available after hours. Keep your sense of humor honed. When Maxwell advises leaders to put "completing fellow leaders ahead of competing with

them," he explains that competition is natural, but a better way to lead peers is to work on balancing competition against reaching team goals.

When leading down: This familiar leadership lesson is to "catch people doing something right," and we can do it only if we leave our workspaces and walk around. In Maxwell's veteran view, development is a process, not an overnight miracle, and individuals thrive on one-on-one contact.

The author divides his book into sections that examine these areas: the myths associated with leading from the middle; the challenges that people face when they try to be 360-degree leaders; the principles they practice when they lead up, down and across; and their value to their organizations.

Founder of the INJOY Group, Maxwell has developed leaders for 30 years and has often heard people ask how to lead from their roles in an organization. He believes that committed employees can always have an impact, and that developing themselves propels them upward. He has sold more than 12 million copies of his 25 books about the principles of success.

ABOUT THE BOOK

THE 360° DEGREE LEADER

Author: John Maxwell 336 pages

ISBN: 0785260927 Publisher: Nelson Business

POP QUIZ: What Kind of Leader Are YOU?

Take our quiz to find out what kind of leader you are. Keep in mind that leadership qualities can change depending on your role, your manager's leadership style, and your employees' differences. Also, you might use a combination of several styles depending on your team's personality, the type of role you have, and the work issues you face. This quiz only suggests how you might respond to important decisions that you might face on a regular basis.

1. You have two days to make a big decision. You:

- A. Decide without input from peers, subordinates or team members.
- B. Depend on your veteran employees to make the decision, knowing they will make the right one.
- C. Quickly convene a meeting with your team members and make your decision based on the prevailing attitude you hear.
- D. Prefer to leave the decision to a subordinate, then take credit if it's a good one and stay silent if it does not work.

2. What do employees want most from their jobs?

- A. Feeling valued
- B. Less stress
- C. Being part of a team
- D. Shared vision and values

3. Your team misses a deadline. You:

- A. Take responsibility, then immediately finish the project yourself.
- B. Appoint one or two people on the team to get the project finished by a new deadline they set themselves.
- C. Find out why the team missed the deadline and ask for suggestions about what the next step should be, then set a new deadline.
- D. Yell at team members, tell the group at large to fix the problem, then stride away.

4. When you have an idea you believe is good for the company, you:

- A. Float it immediately to higher-ups in your organization who can make it happen.
- B. Ask highly trusted members of your team to research and test the idea and get back to you with their thoughts, then forget about it.
- C. Present your idea at a team meeting and seek opinions before deciding what to do next.
- D. It's not your job to have ideas.

5. When a trusted team member is late for three meetings in a row and is evasive with you about the reason, you:

- A. Tell the employee privately that you expect punctuality and insist that the tardiness not occur again.
- B. Ask human resources to find out what is going on, but request no report back to you.
- C. Seek out the advice of several trusted peers.
- D. Confront the employee in a public setting and ask in a loud voice why he or she keeps missing work.

5. Budget concerns mean there will be no raises in the new fiscal year. You:

- A. Discuss the issue with no one, but write and distribute an internal memo instructing people with questions to see you.
- B. Tell your veteran team members there will be no raises, and let them inform employees the way they see fit.
- C. Convene a meeting of team members, break the news and allow questions. Then ask them for ideas on how to tell everyone else and what your organization can offer instead of raises.
- D. You never plan raises in your budget anyway, so it doesn't matter.

If you answered mostly A: A is for autocratic leadership. Although you get the job done efficiently, you tend to be a bit inflexible and this could build resentment among employees, giving you results that will prevent your organization's growth (lack of development and high turnover).

Light-bulb moment: Develop some of your trusted subordinates by teaching them what you do so well, and you won't have to work such long hours. You might even enjoy work more!

If you answered mostly B: B is for benign, or laissez-faire leadership. Your style works best when people are old hands at their jobs, and your employees appreciate you for putting your trust in them. However, be sure to designate specifically who is responsible for which projects or they may not get done.

Light-bulb moment: Set firm deadlines and check along the way to make sure you get what you expect. Also, schedule dates for reports to come directly to you in the form (written or oral) that makes sense for you and the team.

If you answered mostly C: C is for collaborative leadership. It's a nice way to make team members feel useful and a good development tool. It also cuts down on cutthroat competition if everyone has an equal say.

Light-bulb moment: If you are a leader who thrives on quick decisions, or if your organization requires them, find a way to compromise between you-think and group-think.

If you answered mostly D: Your employees probably do not trust you. Do you trust yourself?

Light-bulb moment: One of the first things you can do is to lay a strong foundation by treating others the way you wish to be treated. If you want the responsibility of leading, develop your interpersonal skills in leadership training courses.

"A good leader is a person who takes a little more than his share of the blame and a little less than his share of the credit." – John C. Maxwell, American author and speaker

SUCCESS STORY: CheckPoint 360°: See What People Are Saying

Editor's Note: Here's a checklist for CheckPoint 360°: Complete -- check. Clear -- check. Concise -- check. Comprehensive -- check. Credible -- check. Profiles did not have to dig very deep to find all of these words our clients used to describe CheckPoint. We've paraphrased some of their remarks, but the essence of each comment is intact.

From a healthcare services organization:

Of 141 people we hired over 18 months following our use of The Profile, only one fell through... resulting in an incredible 99.3% success rate in terms of identifying and hiring productive and retainable team members.

From a marketing firm:

We completely restructured one of our departments. The positive results include better motivation, a more focused team, and a significant positive impact on our bottom line.

From a transit organization:

The ease of administration, including online entry and administration, makes use simple and easy. It also gives us timely reports.

From a healthcare services organization:

We first used the CheckPoint 360° Feedback System™ with a team of 25 of our most senior managers. We gained great credibility and universal acceptance of the process. We also received extremely positive response about the quality and depth of information.

From an HR outsourcing organization:

We liked the colorfully presented data and the multiple formats. This allows participants to see their management and team competencies first with a wide-angle lens and then progressively narrow the focus to the survey item level.

From a marketing firm:

The 360-degree feedback provides transparency with our managers, and the information this generates gives us an opportunity to prepare personal plans for the key people within the business.

From a transit organization:

Senior management found helpful the Organizational Management Analysis™ report. It provided a big-picture analysis on management development needs.

From a healthcare services organization:

Not only did we get validated feedback but a useful, comprehensive action plan for each person. They can use this to make changes based on the facts from customized reports.

From an HR outsourcing firm:

Your staff was there to help with follow-up, and this gave credibility to our efforts to provide our managers with top quality, confidential feedback on their management and team competencies.

From a marketing firm:

The process led us to change our thinking in the area of recruitment. We decided to use an interviewing technique program, and thus far our latest recruits are delivering a far higher yield than we had before.

From a healthcare services organization:

The questions are clear, easy to understand and require only a minimal amount of time to complete. This is a time-saver for the respondents, and the information that comes back is concise, solid and accurate.

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"Let's be honest. There's not a business anywhere that is without problems. Business is complicated and imperfect. Every business everywhere is staffed with imperfect human beings and exists by providing a product or service to other imperfect human beings."

– Bob Parsons, entrepreneur and founder of domain registrar, GoDaddy.com