



Seeing True to Break Through

Thoughts from Ron Chapman

October 2009

Hola!

As always, there was some interesting feedback from readers regarding last month's newsletter focusing on the 360 Degree Evaluation. In sum, the 360 is a means of eliciting critical information about ourselves and our effectiveness from multiple vantage points. It's a powerful tool, though not for the faint of heart.

Responses validated all these points. One person noted it may have been the most useful process in her career. Another noted it set into motion whole new directions for her. And two confirmed some of what they heard made them wince.

Yet the most interesting commentary came from a young man who described how it jolted him out of what proved to be mediocrity. In short, his organization and its leaders had failed him rather dramatically by never providing any bonafide developmental feedback. From the moment after graduate school, not once did a supervisor or manager suggest he had needs. They simply continued the pattern of stellar performance assessment he had received throughout his education. No doubt he is above average in many regards, but to reach the age of thirty through college, graduate school, and two career positions without any critique was amazing and certainly an indictment of those who should be providing such valuable information.

Because his 360 was well conceived and delivered, it provided very useful feedback. Though his first reaction was to discount it because it was so at odds with his evaluation experiences, he soon dug in and realized it was accurate. More importantly, he saw that he needed to face some significant challenges he had been unable to see ... challenges that if not confronted would undoubtedly produce underachievement. "With my skills and training, it's so easy for me to coast along."

In our e-dialogue, I shared a phrase that has been very useful to me over the years: "The good is the enemy of the best." It's the finest framing I have seen of how easy it is to accept a comfortable circumstance or reality, and in doing so to fail to seek to elevate that situation or experience. Some might say we are resting on our laurels, or have become complacent. But in my experience it is more like a kind of mesmerism. When we are at ease, even if in a good place, it makes it unlikely we will seek anything better. Thus a good experience undermines the pursuit of a great one.

A superb teacher once told me I should seek to befriend those who had challenges in their lives. When I asked why, he replied, "Because they are doing the work for which life was designed." I must have had a puzzled look on my face because he added, "Greatness only emerges when we encounter resistance. Challenges are that resistance."

As I now understand it, engaging our challenges is what propels us to move beyond a current situation ... no matter how pleasant or comfortable it may be. And those difficulties propel us beyond merely accepting "the good." The result is "the best," which makes an appearance thereafter.

One other mentor put it this way. "As you do this, the choices you have will increasingly be better and better. Eventually you may have to choose between best and best."

That final point inspired me. It made me the kind of man who wants all the possible information about myself. It made me willing to tackle the challenges. The result has been better and better options.

And so I wish it for you! All the best ... and more!

Ron

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