



Seeing True to Break Through

Thoughts from Ron Chapman

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Greetings!

This month we'll examine the 360 Degree Evaluation, an effective means of gathering valuable information about ourselves, our tendencies, our effectiveness, and our failings. As one client remarked in a recent conversation after seeing his results, "It had some great feedback in it. But it sure did disturb me to see some of it!" I asked him about his reaction. He clarified, "It turns out I had some significant misperceptions about myself. It was not pretty." Then he laughed.

Over and over again we return to the importance and value of information if we are to achieve our full potential as leaders ... or anything else. Information is the key to knowledge, which in turn can prove to be the source of wisdom, which is a currency for greatness.

Ideally a well-designed 360 should be simultaneously validating, invigorating and challenging. Sometimes it can be a great threat to our self-concept, which can be extremely uncomfortable. For example, my whole life has been spent in learning in every possible way. And the desire to make a contribution opened many doors to sharing much of that information. So I was deeply oriented to myself as a purveyor of knowledge. When I found out people sometimes don't understand my points, or worse, that I come across as a "know-it-all," I was not pleased.

Yet that information from a 360 allowed me to examine the barriers to what I desired to be. That investigation provided me with key developmental needs for being more effective. Recent feedback indicates I have made much progress. That makes me happy!

What exactly is a 360 Degree Evaluation? Most typically it elicits responses to specific questions from those who view you from as many vantage points as possible. For example, a leadership 360 might use the input from staff who work for you, peers with whom you interact, your superiors, and others who may have unique vantage points from which to contribute. On the other hand, a personal 360 could include family, friends and acquaintances. The only real requirement is that they know you well enough to provide accurate feedback.

If you perform an internet search, you will be overwhelmed with options. Given that, here are a few suggestions that will be helpful.

- Select an instrument that is targeted to your interests and for which you have an affinity. For example, if you are very practical, select a tool and process that has a pragmatic approach.
- Ensure the design has very good protections for anonymity for the respondents. Nothing is worse than knowing who might have said something that is a challenge to hear. It can ruin interaction or relationships.
- Use an approach that includes an intermediary to deliver the resulting information. Some providers offer that as part of their package. An alternative is to hire a coach, or use your mentor. This is critical to protecting the aforementioned anonymity, but may be all the more important in the presentation of findings in a way that you will find useful. Feedback you cannot receive and assimilate is not effective.
- Choose participants based on their ability to tell the truth. The last thing we need is feedback that does nothing more than validate our self-image at the expense of the kind of candor that can be life changing.
- Opting for a process that has clear developmental applications can be very helpful. Knowing personal challenges is not enough, we must have ideas or suggestions for solutions.

Assuming you're at least intrigued or perhaps interested in a 360, let me share one important fact which comes from my social work background. Nothing prevents growth more than enabling behavior. Enabling keeps us from having to see ourselves clearly and bear the full brunt of any downsides to our behavior or tendencies. Accurate feedback provided in an appropriate fashion offers nothing less than life transforming possibilities.

We have nothing to lose but our ignorance or self-delusions, though we may also receive some exceptional validations. As my mentor often says, "Can't hurt, and might help." Why not?

All the best ... and more!

Ron

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