

UNDERSTANDING ONESELF

(self-awareness)

Introduction

- **This is not about trying to change yourself – as you are unlikely to succeed. On the other hand, you can work on ways to improve your performance.**
- You are the best person to be in control of your destiny. To do this you need to know yourself, ie your strengths and weaknesses. **If you don't control your future, somebody else will!!!!**
- Understanding yourself is **linked with taking responsibility for and control of your future**. This starts with an **accurate assessment of your current skills and performance**, ie your strengths and weaknesses, etc. This can involve seeking views of people who will be brutally truthful in their specific feedback and to your being receptive to inputs from a wide range of people who know you well.
- Generally there is **not** much genuine willingness to embrace change that is **not** rooted in a **thorough, often hard-won knowledge of oneself, one's roles, foibles, strengths and areas of opportunity for further personal development and behavioural changes**.

"...Changing organisations begins with changing people, and changing people requires personal awareness.....The more you know about yourself, the more you will understand the ways you limit your effectiveness through self-imposed obstacles, distortions in thinking, and unproductive habits. Information about yourself will also teach you how to make the most of the strengths.....Learning about yourself and your situation is directly related to success. As John Kotter states,

"...you grab a challenge, act on it, and honestly reflect on why your actions worked or didn't. You learn from it and then move on. The continuous process of life-long learning helps enormously in a rapidly changing economic environment..."

Robert Kriegel et al, 1996

"...The most important relationship you have in life is the one with yourself. In order to have that and to like yourself, you have to be very honest..."

Diane von Furstenberg as quoted by Marion Hume, 2011

Questions

The questions below will help to bring significant personal attributes into focus. Answer the questions as an individual and then report your answers to someone who works closely with you so that they act as a reality check on your responses.

1 WHAT ARE YOU MOST PASSIONATE ABOUT, INTERESTED IN, AND HAVE THE ENERGY AND TIME FOR?

Another way of looking at this is to ask if money was not a barrier to what would you like to do?

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Remember: passion is very powerful. It is worth more than determination or commitment. It is linked with **intrinsic, rather than extrinsic, motivation.**

Having a passion for something usually suggests that you have the **strength to handle personal setbacks, overcome adversity, face and address your weaknesses, and be willing to work long hours.**

Passion has 2 very positive emotions (**satisfaction** and **pleasure**; with satisfaction being more important). It is **not** about immediate rewards, ie

"...The experience is characterized by being totally absorbed in the flow of what's happening.....more than your technical knowledge, or even your hard work, it is your passion that empowers you.....It is the energy that fuels creativity, courage and compassion.....its absence leaves you feeling disconnected, dependent and bored..."

Martyn Newman, 2007

Furthermore,

"...passionate people are productive, persistent and high-performance. They look for creative challenges, love learning new things and take great pride in a job well done. They often seem bored with the status quo and display a constant energy for discovering how things can be improved..."

Martyn Newman, 2007

Passionate people are able to visualise what they would like to achieve or produce and thus imagine and attempt the "impossible".

"... it's a psychological truth that you'll become more and more like the people with whom you most identify..."

Martyn Newman, 2007

Also, mix with people who will challenge you.

Some questions to help you identify the areas where your passion lies

- **What do you like doing?**
- **What are your hobbies?**
- **What makes you get out of bed in the morning with "a spring in your step"?**
- **What do you have the determination to do, irrespective of the consequences?**

(You will always perform best when you have passion/interest/energy/time for something.)

2 WHAT ARE YOUR STRENGTHS?

Usually your strengths are the areas that you like working in, and when you work in these areas, you perform better. Need to focus on your strengths as it is easier to build your performance on strengths rather than weaknesses.

Remember: we are hardwired **to be alert for things that might mean danger**; in current times in the workplace this can be a threat to our job security, our career progression or our relationships with colleagues and managers. Because of this, **we remember the tiny criticisms and forget the many compliments**, ie

"...It is so ingrained into us to look at the negative, or where we need to improve..."

Gretchen Spreitzer as quoted by Fiona Smith, 2008c

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One way to handle this is to **concentrate on our strengths rather than weaknesses** by asking colleagues, managers, direct reports, family, friends and others who know you well to describe the times they have seen you at your best.

Furthermore, the **definition of a strength can be contextual and situational**. For example, **dyslexia is regarded as disadvantage by the general community. Yet many successful entrepreneurs**, such as Richard Branson (Virgin), Kerry Packer (Consolidated group of companies), John Chambers (Cisco), Paul Orfalea (Kinko), Walt Disney (Disney Entertainment), Ted Turner (CNN), Charles Schwab (Charles Schwab & Co.), etc have exhibited **signs of dyslexia**. In addition to the advantage to creativity by seeing things differently, **the coping skills that dyslexics develop in their formative years become a basis for a successful business career**. For example,

- a child who continually fails standardized tests **becomes comfortable with failure and is therefore willing to take risks**
- being a slow reader forces them to **extract only vital information**, ie they are constantly getting right to the point and focussing on the big picture
- they are forced to trust and rely on others to get things done, ie **delegate**

3 HOW CAN YOU IMPROVE YOUR STRENGTHS?

Where are the gaps in your strengths? Do you need to improve your skills or acquire new ones?

NB Remember: mastering a new field takes time, ie

"...Much research confirms that it takes up to 10 years to master a new discipline..."

Howard Gardner, 2006

4 WHERE ARE THE GAPS IN YOUR KNOWLEDGE CAUSING PROBLEMS?

Identify areas of ignorance and/or gaps in your knowledge that need filling, including areas that you need to work on to acquire skills and expertise so that you fully realise your strengths.

Remember:

"...Intellectual arrogance causes disabling ignorance..."

Peter Drucker, 2001

Sometimes people who are experts in one discipline are contemptuous of knowledge in other disciplines, or believe that being "bright" is a substitute for knowing

5 WHAT THINGS DO YOU FAIL TO DO THAT INHIBITS YOUR EFFECTIVENESS AND PERFORMANCE?

For example:

- **How good are your skills in people-handling, organising, planning, reflection, implementing, etc?**
- **What are your bad habits?**
- **Does your job allow you every day to do what you are truly best at?**

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- Are you given opportunities to shine at what you do, presented with creative challenges, set clear goals, and do you feel a sense of control and self-expectancy?
- Do you give and receive constructive feedback on performance?
- Do you walk the talk, ie do what you say you will do?

NB

"...Who you really are is forged by your actions. Although your thoughts and feelings affect your behaviour, it's equally true that your behaviour affects the thoughts and feelings. In other words, what you do determines who you really are..."

Martyn Newman, 2007

6 ARE YOUR MANNERS ADEQUATE?

Manners, consideration and courtesies like smiling, saying "please" and "thank you", and knowing a person's name or asking about his/her family comprise the lubricating oil of an organisation. It is the law of nature that 2 moving bodies in contact with each other create friction – this is true for humans!

Alternatively **rudeness reduces performance** on all tasks (creative and routine). Furthermore, rudeness decreases other people's willingness to help. Generally rudeness occurs in 1 of 3 ways:

- i) instigated by a direct authority figure
- ii) delivered by a third party
- iii) imagined rudeness

7 HOW DO YOU RATE ON THE ELEMENTS OF HAPPINESS? (TICK WHERE APPROPRIATE COLUMNS BELOW?)

"...Happiness comes from balancing what you love, what you're good at and what the world needs..."
Oliver Segovia, 2012.

This means do what you have a **passion** for; have the **skills** and **expertise** to handle; especially if it is a **worthy cause**.

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Which of the 10 keys to happiness/well-being do you have?

Elements of happiness	Answer* ⁱ		
	Yes	Maybe	No
i. Healthy family relationship			
ii. Adequate money			
iii. Interesting work			
iv. Live in good community			
v. Wide range of interesting friends			
vi. Good health			
vii. Personal freedom			
viii. Good personal values			
ix. Good philosophy of life			
x. Respected by your peers			

Notes

i) The more “yes” answers the better

- **“Authentic happiness” is about positive emotions, engagement, optimism and meaning plus serving others** (civil engagement, spiritual connectedness and physical fitness) rather than accumulating material goods. It is about focusing, understanding and applying your signature strengths, ie the things that you enjoy doing. **Happy people work harder and live longer.**

- **Jobs are not just about money anymore.** Workplace studies show that **pay is not the major reason people are working so hard or so long and/or changing jobs.** Despite well-being still being equated with consumption, it has failed to deliver high levels of personal happiness. It is called the **happiness paradox.** Key factors contributing to happiness are

“...the environment in which they work, the community of colleagues, autonomy and a sense of value the work gives is highly rated. This is reflected in broader research that showed community, friends and family relationships, and a sense of purpose is all essential ingredients in the happiness formula...”

Catherine Fox, 2006j

- It is of interest to note that research has shown that **economic growth, as shown by increased choice and increased material affluence, have not increased happiness in affluent societies.** For example

“...as the GDP more than doubled in the last 30 years, the proportions of Americans describing themselves as ‘very happy’ declined by around 5 percent, or by 14 million people...”

Karl-Erik Sveiby et al, 2006

8 WHAT ARE YOUR WEAKNESSES?

Generally, we waste too much time on trying to improve our areas of low competency and weaknesses, and it may be more prudent to “hire” staff or outsource to fill this gap. In other words,

“...Be yourself. Play off your strengths and make sure you understand your weaknesses. You need people around you who complement you...”

Richard Goyder, 2008

It is interesting to note **that many famous and successful partnerships have involved people with complementary strengths and weaknesses.** For example, Anita Roddick’s assessment of her business partnership in Body Shop with her husband Gordon

“...I am good up front, dealing with the public and the customers.....Gordon is a fantastic behind-the-scenes organiser. His strengths are my weaknesses and vice versa; that is why we are a good partnership...”

Anita Roddick as quoted by Emily Ross et al, 2004

For the **Body Shop**: Anita Roddick is the “face” of the Body Shop and Gordon Roddick is the strategist

Other examples of “perfect match” include

- **Microsoft**: Bill Gates – the nerd/entrepreneur who had an uncanny ability to anticipate what his customers would need in the future, and Steve Ballmer – the numbers man/the “head kicker”
- **Google**: Larry Page and Sergey Brin – the nerds/entrepreneurs, while Eric Schmidt is the manager who runs the firm on a daily basis as he is familiar with technology plus financial matters and the investment community
- **Dell**: Michael Dell – the visionary entrepreneur and Kevin Rollins - handles the daily operations of the company
- **Sony**: Akio Morita – marketing, and Masaru Ibuka – technology development
- **HP**: Bill Hewlett - the technical leader, and David Packard - the business leader
- **Nutrimetics**: Bill Roche – best in planning, backroom management and Imelda Roche – people and personal issues
- **Lonely Planet**: Tony Wheeler – creative side, ie writing and research, and Maureen Wheeler – business strategy and implementer
- **Coca-Cola**: John Pemberton – the inventor (the formula for the drink), and Asa Candler – sales and marketing strategy
- **Avon**: David McConnell – inventor (developed affordable fragrances), and Mrs Albee – selling through a network of representatives rather than stores
- **McDonald’s**: Richard and Maurice McDonald – the entrepreneurs (develop the products and systems to produce standardised products), and Ray Kroc – salesman who developed the way to expand the concept
- **Harvey Norman**: Gerry Harvey – the “face” of Harvey Norman, and Katie Page – the “power behind the throne”
- **Nolan Meats**: Three brothers are in control, ie Terry – marketing/sales and PR; Michael – production; Tony – technological development

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- **eBay**: Pierre Omidyar - the innovator (a website where people could post things for sale and others could bid for them) and Jeff Skoll – strategic planning and analysis
- **Blackberry**: Mike Lazaridis – the entrepreneur (access to your emails anywhere) and Jim Balsillie – figures man, ie Chartered Accountant
- **Nike**: Bill Bowerman – entrepreneur (modified sports shoes so that they became fashion items) and Phil Knight – implementer
- **Levi's**: Jacob Davis – inventor (idea to rivet the pockets on pants to give extra strength) and Levi Straus – marketing/distribution
- **Esprit**: Susie Russell – creator (clothes) and Doug Tompkins – marketing
- **Tupperware**: Earl Silas Tupper – inventor (plastic, made from polyethylene that was not smelly or brittle, was used to produce food-storage containers that were air tight) and Brownie Wise – marketing and sales (Tupperware saleswomen)
- **Apple**: Steve Wozniak – inventor (Apple computers) and Steve Jobs (entrepreneur and marketing)
- **id Software**: John Carmack - inventor (computer gaming) and John Romero (designer extraordinaire)
- **Zimmermann (fashion)**: – involves 2 sisters: Nicky (creative talent) and Simone (business brain).

NB Even though all these combinations complement each other in expertise, personality, etc, the right chemistry also needs to be present, ie they still have to “click”. In fact, they do not have to be friends but need to respect and value each other’s opinion.

Furthermore, even though they may have different expertise and strengths, they will need to share the same set of values to be successful.

9 HOW DO YOU LEARN AND PERFORM BEST?

In which of these 5 modes do you perform/learn best?

- Visual**, ie reading/watching (*I see/imagine/picture where you are coming from*)
- Auditory**, ie listening/talking (*I hear where you are coming from or That sounds great*)
- Kinaesthetic**, ie writing/doing/touch/feel (*It's just hit me; I figured it out; I feel it; I want to touch on a couple of points*)
- Gustatory**, ie taste (*I can taste it*)
- Olfactory**, ie smell (*I can smell it*)

Most taste is linked with smell. There are 5 tastes that our tongues differentiate: bitter (by far the most sensitive one), salty, sweet, sour and umami (savoury taste that is given off by foods rich in amino acids, such as glutamates)

Unless you are in the food or wine industry, the auditory, visual and kinaesthetic are the most important in working life.

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Three simple ways to ascertain someone's preferred mode include

- i) **request a recitation of the alphabet:** the visual people will stare as if now looking at a blackboard on which the alphabet appears; auditory people will sing the alphabet; kinesthetic people will tap out the letters.
- ii) when talking to someone, **watch his/her eye movement.** If the eyes move upwards, he/she prefers visual mode; if eyes move laterally (left or right), he/she prefers auditory; if eyes move downwards, he/she prefers kinaesthetic.
- iii) see how a person responds when talking to him/her and at the same time placing **your hands at different parts of your body**, ie
 - when placing your hands at **eye level** and the person responds, he/she is more comfortable in the **visual mode**;
 - when placing your hands at **ear level** and the person responds, he/she is more comfortable in the with the **auditory mode**;
 - when placing your hands **infront of your hips** and the person responds, he/she is more comfortable in the **kinaesthetic mode**.

The preferred mode is often intertwined with personality, and if you apply cultural stereotypes, the British are auditory, Americans are visual and Australians are kinaesthetic!

Furthermore, this is linked with what activates people. A useful tool is the following typology

- Thinking types are activated by an idea
- Intuitive types are activated by a vision
- Sensate types need a plan
- Feeling types need everyone to have a part in the undertaking)

10 WHAT ARE YOUR CORE VALUES (LIST THE MOST IMPORTANT ONES)?

Core values are the few critical values that you must live by. Values are principles, the standards, the actions that the people represent, and which are considered inherently worthwhile and of utmost importance. Remember: behaviours demonstrate the values.

- i) These values can fall into one or more of 3 categories
- ii) **personal** (related to your own life, ie friends, family, interests, etc – such as honesty, respect, treat others as you want to be treated, fairness, etc)
- iii) **interpersonal** (things that define your group and relations between members of the group - such as loyalty and trust, selection on merit, etc)
- iv) **transpersonal values** (values that transcend your own personal and group values, ie universal values such as sanctity of life, protecting the world for future generations, justice, etc)

11 ARE YOUR VALUES COMPATIBLE WITH THOSE PRACTISED BY THE ORGANISATION YOU WORK FOR?

To be effective in an organisation, a person's values must be compatible, and able to co-exist, with the organisation's values. Ethics are a part of this.

Understanding oneself

A person's strengths and the way a person performs rarely conflict, ie the two are complementary. But do not confuse your strengths with values. **If there are conflicts between your values and strengths, the values will prevail.**

Values and character are linked. One of the measures of character is the degree to which you **put the interest of your organisation and colleagues ahead of you own.** This means doing things for others without regard to self-interest, ie

".. they have the mindset of an owner and figure out what they would do if they were the ultimate decision maker. They are willing to make a recommendation that would benefit the organisation's overall performance, possibly to the detriment of their own. They have the courage to trust that they will eventually be rewarded, even if their actions may not be in their short-term interest..."

Robert Kaplan, 2008

12 WHAT TYPE OF WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER PEOPLE DO YOU PREFER?

Some people work best as subordinates, some people operate best as team members, others alone, while others are good coaches and mentors

13 DO YOU PRODUCE OPTIMUM RESULTS AS A DECISION-MAKER OR AS AN ADVISER?

Many people perform best as advisers, as they cannot take the burden and pressure of making decisions; others need an adviser to force them to think before making decisions. This is a reason a "2 IC" often fails when promoted to the top position

14 DO YOU PERFORM BEST AS A PLANNER/THINKER OR AS AN IMPLEMENTER/DOER?

It is very rare that one person is both a planner and implementer; usually you are one or the other. Are you a planner or implementer/doer, leader or follower?

15 DO YOU PERFORM WELL UNDER PRESSURE/STRESS OR DO YOU NEED A HIGHLY STRUCTURED AND PREDICTABLE ENVIRONMENT?

Some people like the adrenaline rush of pressure/stress, while others prefer the safer environment of structure

16 DO YOU WORK BEST IN A BIG ORGANISATION OR A SMALL ONE?

Very few people work well in all kinds of environments/cultures/mindsets, ie hands-on management v. delegation, specialist v. generalist, etc.

Some general differences between what a big organisation offers compared to a small one:

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Big Organisation	Small Organisation
Healthy work/life balance	Staff feel more valued
Job security	Opportunity for exercising responsibility
Effective pay packaging	Opportunity to express creativity
Greater likelihood of avoiding personality conflict	Opportunity to work in a team/collegial environment
Recognized brand or image	Job autonomy
Formal policies (childcare, health plans, etc)	Minimal bureaucracy
Corporate citizenship	Profit-sharing
Job specialization	Opportunity to own part of business
Opportunity to work overseas	
Opportunity to travel	

17 DO YOU PERFORM MORE EFFECTIVELY IN COMMODITY-TYPE ORGANISATIONS (GENERALLY LOW-MARGIN BUT HIGH-VOLUME) OR IN HIGHLY-DIFFERENTIATED PRODUCT AND/OR SERVICE-BASED ORGANISATIONS (GENERALLY HIGH-MARGIN BUT LOW-VOLUME)?

The people in the commodity-type organisations have a more short-termed focus on the “nuts and bolts” of management, they tend to discuss operating margins and cash flow, and investigate ways to squeeze efficiencies out of every process. On the other hand, people in the highly-differentiated product and/or service-based organisations are more long-termed in focus, ie larger investments with longer periods until pay-off.

18 WHAT SHOULD YOUR CONTRIBUTION BE AND WHERE DO YOU BELONG?

To answer this, one needs to address 3 distinct elements:

- i) **What does the situation require and how would you do it?**
- ii) **Given your strengths, the way you perform best and your values,** how can you make the greatest contribution to what needs to be done and know where you belong?
- iii) **What results have to be achieved to make a difference?** Ideally the results should be hard to achieve, ie “stretching”, and should be meaningful, visible and measurable.

Understanding oneself

"...Yes, I'll do that. But this is the way I should be doing it. This is the way it should be structured. This is the way my relationships should be. These are the kinds of results you should expect from me, and in this time frame, because this is who I am..."

Peter Drucker, 2001

19 WHAT ARE THE STRENGTHS, LEARNING METHODS AND VALUES OF YOUR CO-WORKERS (INCLUDING YOUR BOSS)?

This is linked with understanding what others are doing, how they work, what contribution they make and the expected results. As most people work with others, we need to accept that

Other people are also individuals: like you, they have strengths, perform/learn in a certain way and possess values

Additional comments

- Remember: it is very difficult to succeed if you don't have the required expertise that is central for your chosen activities.

Furthermore,

- you need to identify the **three or four most important elements** that lead to success in your particular business/position, eg developing close relationships with your top customers, selecting the right staff, being innovative, etc.
- you need to **enjoy implementing these most important elements.**
- **The existence of trust between people does not necessarily mean they like one another.** It means that they understand one another
- **Relationship responsibility is linked with communications; effective relationships require effective communications.** Usually personality clashes/conflicts arise between people who do not understand each other's strengths, how others best perform/learn and each other's values. In other words, most conflict arises when people do not know what other people are doing and how they do their work, or what contribution the other people are concentrating on and what results they expect. And the reason they do not know is that they have not asked and therefore have not been told. It is important to demonstrate or explain to your co-workers what you are good at, how you prefer to work and what you value highly.

This technique provides a good starting point for people to start talking to each other about their perceptions of themselves and others' perceptions of them

- **Successful people invariably demonstrate most or all of these elements:**
 - **enjoy their work;**
 - **have a positive attitude and plenty of confidence;**
 - **know their strengths and weaknesses;**
 - **learn from mistakes/negative experiences;**
 - **are decisive, set goals and have the discipline to achieve them;**
 - **have integrity; are persistent, ie do not give up easily; know how to prioritise;**
 - **willing to delegate;**

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- develop good communication and problem-solving skills;
 - are willing to delegate; take intelligent risks;
 - surround themselves with competent, responsible and supportive people;
 - are willing to hire or associate with people who are more competent than themselves;
 - are willing to mentor others;
 - have high energy levels with a healthy lifestyle;
 - are willing to improve their expertise, ie life-long learning;
 - willing to face reality, ie willing to change, if required;
 - have a sense of spirituality;
 - have a sense of purpose and commitment to make society a “better place to live”, ie a purpose beyond self-interest (not selfish);
 - have a good sense of humour
- Remember: successful people make the best of their opportunities. Furthermore, it has been suggested that

"...they are invariably the beneficiaries of hidden advantages and extraordinary opportunities and cultural legacies that allow them to learn and work hard and make sense of the world in ways others cannot. It makes a difference where and when we grew up. The culture we belong to and the legacies passed down by our forebears shape the patterns on our achievements in ways we cannot begin to imagine..."

Malcolm Gladwell, 2008

- If by answering the above does result in a career/lifestyle change, **handling expectations of others can be a challenge**. Generally, we live our lives through the prism of how others perceive us. Sometimes it takes a lot of courage to go deviate from this perception!!!!
- Self-awareness may also be enhanced via exposure to classic literature, which has

"...a fundamental truth to teach in regards to change: change always arises out of something unexpected.....By reading great imaginative literature, you can prepare yourself for surprise and even get a kind of strength that welcomes and exploits the unexpected.....move away from the passive state of surprise to an active one in which one can exploit the wonder of surprise and be able to surprise others. In other words, I believe that literature can increase the capacity for mastering change..."

Harold Bloom as quoted by AFRBoss, June 2001

Furthermore,

"...What is it about William Shakespeare that makes him such a genius? There is little doubt that the key to understanding his greatness is that he, more than any other writer in English, understood the workings of the human mind. From time to time, other writers from this and other countries, such as Chaucer, Montaigne and Dostoevsky, are cited as men who come closest to this aspect of Shakespeare's gift, but I suspect there is no one who so consistently betrays the full range of human consciousness.....none of Shakespeare's near contemporaries.....had this extraordinary understanding and involvement with the breadth and range of human mind.....the understanding of so many inner selves is what gives Shakespeare his towering reputation for intellect..."

Robert Winston, 2003

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(sources: Peter Drucker, 1999a & 2001; Robert Kriegel et al, 1996; AFRBoss, June 2001; Carl Jung, 1996; Karyn Schluter-White, 2002; Rosie Fitzgerald, 2001; Alan Pease et al, 2002; Joe Mar, 2004; Jack Welch et al, 2005; Fiona Smith, 2005; Bertram Wolfe, 1966; Schein, 2004; Robert Winston, 2003; Emily Ross et al, 2004; Katrina O'Brien, 2006; Michael Hanley, 2006; Mike Hanley, 2006d; Catherine Fox, 2006j; Brad Hatch, 2006 & 2006e; Martin Seligman, 2002; Karl-Erik Sveiby et al, 2006; Martyn Newman, 2007; Fiona Smith, 2008c; Richard Goyder, 2008; Robert Kaplan, 2008; Adam Cox, 2008; Christine Porath et al, 2007; Richard Branson, 2008; Malcolm Gladwell, 2008; Oliver Segovia, 2012)

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