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Talking HR by ELISSA DASS

Have you gone off course?

When your talents are not showing anymore, what are the causes, and more importantly, the remedy?

WERE you once performing at your peak but now are just on par with your peers, or below average? Have you ever promoted a high-performer only to find that he didn't seem cut out for his new role? This does not signify the lack of talent in an individual. The truth is, derailment can happen to anyone of us.

In my last article entitled *Talent and motives alignment*, we looked at some development interventions for Thor, Hulk and Iron Man based on their level of talent and motives.

This week, let's focus a little more on the Hulks in our organisation; understanding these high-performers whose motivation to perform has become lower than their talent to do so. The Hulks also tend to be more prone to derailment or burn-out compared to the Thors and Iron Men in our midst.

In this article, let's define those who have derailed as those who have not been able to live up to their full potential like they used to. To that, Suzanne Ross, a doctoral researcher at Nottingham Trent University, reports that individuals go off track due to both internal and external factors in her paper entitled *Talent Derailment: A Multi-Dimensional Perspective for Understanding Talent*.

Many experts and researchers agree that both organisational HR and individuals need to be more responsive instead of reactive in identifying the potential cause of derailment, and mitigate them effectively. Let's discuss a few issues here.

Individual elements

Before you place the blame on the organisation and environment, let's do a self-check.

As a leader climbs higher up the corporate ladder, you begin to realise two things – that it's lonely up there, and that it's not so much about your competence as it is about your character. You find that people start to look up to you because of who you are. One key area here is the Emotional Intelligence (EQ) of a person. As you grow into larger roles, you would be expected to have a more balanced sense of task and people, and often, it is this higher sense of EQ that helps leaders win support from the team. At times, our unmet needs for praise and rewards cause discouragement that mounts over time.

Challenges during transitions

Ram Charan, Stephen Drotter and James Noel shared a leadership pipeline model that outlines six key transitional phases in a leader's

journey. Starting from a phase called "Managing Self", the individual contributor grows into the role of "Managing Others" and subsequently to "Managing Managers" before they are promoted to be functional managers, business managers, group managers and enterprise managers.

Charan et al argue that each transition requires both the acquisition of new ways of working and the letting go of old ways of working in three key areas: skills and capabilities, working time frames, and values around what is important to focus on.

This accurate observation is an important element that all leaders need to understand to minimise the possibility of derailment.

As leaders move to a new position, some of them expect to do the same thing as what had provided them success previously. Unfortunately, this is not always the best way.

Job and organisational mismatch

Often, we forget an important element of a person's success in an organisation – job and culture fit. Someone who is creative and constantly challenging status quo may feel constrained in a company that does not encourage innovation.

Similarly, promoting a marketing-inclined person to a production-oriented role may be HR setting him up for failure. In his book *Derailed: 5 Lessons Learned from Catastrophic Failures of Leadership*, Dr Tim Irwin shares some lessons learned from six chief executive officers who experienced "failure". I would like to share four of these quick truths about all of us:

- Character trumps competence – who you are is more important than what you can do.

- The lack of self/other awareness is a common denominator of all derailments.

- We are always who we are – especially under stress.

- Derailment is not inevitable, but without attention to development, it is probable.

Keeping yourself and everyone else on track is possible. Being reactive to find out the potential causes of derailment for an individual and putting in place the necessary interventions will help reduce a lot of unnecessary cost that will come into play at a later stage.

So, keep your eyes focused on your goals and your wheels on the track!

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