

## **Management and Performance Associates – October 2014**

### **Get comfortable with being uncomfortable**

Malala Yousafzai is a teenage Pakistani activist for female education. Her family runs a chain of schools in Pakistan. In October 2012, the Taliban attempted to assassinate Malala when they boarded her school bus and shot her in the head.

In 2013, she spoke at the United Nations about the importance of education and was selected by TIME Magazine as one of the 100 most influential people in the world. She has received awards and recognitions from many countries around the world. This month, she became the youngest person to ever receive a Nobel Peace Prize.

Reading this fantastic news caused us to reflect on education and development. Some people like Malala fight for it, while it's easy for others to take it for granted. MAPA Consulting offers several programs for development and we see both types in our classrooms. Unfortunately we occasionally meet participants who do not take full advantage of their development opportunity.

We often explore the idea that development is connected to moving out of your comfort zone. The following are some ideas to help you do that and embrace development.

#### **1 | Dare to experiment and venture into unknown territory.**

\* Stop listening only to people who agree with you. Discover the value of differences. Surround yourself with different voices.

\* Ask for their feedback and consider different points of view. Without it, we cannot become aware of our blind spots. Remember, this can be uncomfortable, but it is designed for your development, not for your enjoyment. Some people ask for feedback, but all they want to hear is what

they did well. Sorry, no. Feedback does not work that way. Every coin has two sides.

\* Search for unexplored paths. If your studies and your career were concentrated in one field, then perhaps it is time to venture into new fields. Life in sales can be exciting and rewarding, but dare to spend some time in Risk Management, or Operations, or Human Resources. We are not necessarily suggesting a transfer, but perhaps an internship in another area or being part of a multifunctional project. Seasoned professionals have a broad experience in many different fields.

#### **2 | When eating an elephant, take one bite at a time.**

\* Problems which were created over decades cannot be fixed in a five minute coaching session or with some feedback. Observe the path and the process, not the event. Ask yourself what you can do to further develop. Small actions may have a major impact. Continue asking for feedback and make course corrections whenever necessary. Extreme Makeover can be an entertaining television show. Unfortunately, it does not apply to changing our issues overnight.

#### **3 | Be informed of what is available out of your comfort zone (the stretch zone).**

\* Observe other brave explorers. What do they do? Talk to them. Consider their ideas. Learn from them. Come with your own conclusions. Adapt to your scenario and environment.

\* Visualize the consequences of walking through a risky path. Where can you get support to proceed? Look for allies and mentors out of your comfort zone. Remember that the comfort zone is normally

associated with mastery. And the arrogance that there is nothing else to learn.

#### **4| Be clear on how far you want to go.**

\* Some people do not want to be further developed, and that's okay, providing that their performance is acceptable. There is nothing wrong with the comfort zone, if performance is in line with expectations. The problem begins when the whole world around us is changing, which requires new and creative responses, while we're stuck in the past; and whose world doesn't change? In today's environment of constant change, it doesn't take long for someone to become outdated, without development.

\* On deciding to navigate your stretch zone, remember that the move has to be realistic. If you're thinking about becoming the next CEO, that shows a lot of commitment—to the company and to your career, but is it feasible? Do you have what it takes to get there: competencies, motivation and potential? It's much better to plan on the next move rather than the long stretch by thinking short term rather than decades ahead.

\* Once the destination is chosen, we need to find a path to get there. Research from the *Center for Creative Leadership* shows ten percent of development comes from formal training and academic studies. Coaching, feedback, and observing others represent another twenty percent. The remaining seventy percent of development comes from the challenges of the job itself, e.g.: new assignments, new responsibilities, new tasks, multi functional projects, etc.

\* Let's consider the act of learning a new language. If we simply attend classes, that will account for only ten percent of our learning ability. If we add new activities, such as watching movies and television programs in that language as well as social gatherings

where that language is spoken, this will leverage our formal learning and account for an additional twenty percent, as we increase our vocabulary and also improve our understanding of different accents. Finally, if we participate in conference calls, study groups, and/or immerse ourselves in that language by traveling abroad, we will be working an additional seventy percent of our development.

Next time you're offered a lateral move, without extra pay, or no change in title, think about the new competencies you may acquire. With more challenge comes more development. A multi-functional project, where you are dealing with more senior and more competent people might also help to develop your influencing skills.

If you have always managed a homogeneous team, consider making it a more diverse team. If you never moved away from your hometown, consider an assignment on the other side of the country or abroad. There is no better way to develop your cross cultural skills than on the job.

**See you next time. We welcome your feedback.**

To know more of our training programs, please send us an e-mail to:

[sergio.pereira@mapa-way.com](mailto:sergio.pereira@mapa-way.com) or  
[sonia.dondice@mapa-way.com](mailto:sonia.dondice@mapa-way.com)

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