

When Confidence Becomes A Weakness

In a recent Forbes online article, Kevin Ready, who writes about entrepreneurship and is the author of the book *“Startup: An Insider’s Guide to Launching and Running a Business”* discusses how successful executives get where they are because of their ability to make good decisions. Typically, this talent for choosing the right path comes from years of experience supported by a high level of self-confidence. There are occasions, however, when this hard-earned confidence can actually become a weakness.

As a business advisor, Ready has seen the downside of confidence surface when a leader fails to recognize the boundaries of their expertise. In these cases, it’s easy to make mistakes or exert bad judgment because of lack of applicable experience in an area of decision making. Leaders that have spent years earning their stripes in their respective disciplines, assert this hard-earned expertise in places where they shouldn’t.

To combat this tendency, Ready has seen the most effective leaders take the following steps to keep themselves in check and manage both inside and outside their areas of strength.

Self reflection

Frequently taking stock of your skills and your weaknesses is a healthy exercise for everyone – especially leaders. While it may seem anathema to leadership to consider where your skill set ends and uncertainty begins, it can be foundational to your success.

It’s not about you

One big step to avoiding the confidence error comes in realizing that it’s not about you. This is a panacea for multiple management woes – including this area of confidence outside of your area. When managers frame their decisions in an egocentric way, they can lead themselves astray in the process. When it’s about you, the urge to manage outside of your expertise can be irresistible. Framing to outcomes (“let’s get this right”) instead of process (“I did this”) is a fundamental and healthy starting point.

Paying Attention

Misplaced confidence is often driven by simple failure to pay attention, letting the warm feeling of command spill outside of the lines where it belongs. Being present when making decisions is a good start to avoiding the pitfalls of misplaced confidence.

Surround yourself with people smarter than you

Find people that know more about every part of your business than you do, and listen to them. This magnifies your efficacy and increases the quality of every decision you make. With experts to guide you, every decision has the power of multiple minds behind it – always better than one mind alone.

Ready believes that these steps underscore the real key trait, which is wisdom. The best leaders are wise enough to understand the limits of their knowledge and are willing to embrace doubt when appropriate to build the trust necessary to be successful.