

Below the Waterline Skills - Temperament

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Understanding our personality style such as our temperament allows us to focus on our strengths and build empathy for the talents of our colleagues. The Big Five Personality Temperament Styles (Openness, Conscientiousness, Extroversion, Emotionally Reactiveness, and Agreeableness) dictate how we work with students and our colleagues.

Context

The international company designed and produced semiconductors in a highly competitive environment. Engineers at the plant were among the best in the industry, many of them holding patents.

Professionals throughout the company were encouraged to seek support from one particular manager who had really good ideas for resolving technical issues and controlling costs. The manager was brilliant but arrogant. He tended to belittle those who consulted him, so they stopped seeking him out.

Challenge

Technical problems were time-sensitive and expensive. The manager's arrogance was compromising total team effort and jeopardizing productivity. A critical plant resource was left, quite literally, twiddling his thumbs.

Solution

The personnel director and the plant manager decided the individual needed coaching, so they brought in William Stone. The intervention included a nationally normed temperament assessment, a series of "360" interviews among the manager's supervisors and potential internal clients, and a three-month series of weekly coaching sessions.

The temperament assessment helped both the manager and Stone develop a vocabulary for describing both helpful and distracting behaviors on the manager's part.

The manager tended to be all business and not to indulge in "small talk," and to smirk whenever he pointed out "the errors" he found in his colleagues' efforts. Stone assigned the manager a quota of "small talk" sessions and some work with a mirror to change his smirk to a smile.

He left the first session complaining that it sounded like a waste of the company's money and his time. In the second session, Stone asked the manager how his "small talk" efforts were going. The manager replied rather sheepishly, "I've been talking about everything from snowmobiles to new babies and they're starting to ask me for help."

Results

Stone and the manager enhanced the manager's awareness of what helped the consulting process and what seemed to keep clients away.

With a new awareness of his behaviors, the manager's expert technical support was now widely accessed by his colleagues. Six months after the first interview, the manager was awarded a bonus by the plant manager.