

THE POWER TO SEE OURSELVES

A refreshing reminder of the importance of self-knowledge in our quest to be part of the process of change. It is reprinted from the Harvard Business Review.

Each of us, whether we realise it or not, has self-image. We see ourselves in some way—smart, slow, kindly, well-intentioned, lazy, or shrewd; we all can pick adjectives that describe ourselves. This self-concept is important because everything we do or say, everything we hear, feel, or otherwise perceive, is influenced by how we see ourselves.

Self-concept also has a great deal to do with manager development—with being a growing person and eventually realising one's self-potential. I can report that fact from experience—and add the further observation that no one can tell managers exactly how to grow. Rather, the most one can do is to help managers understand themselves in their own situations, and then trust them to find the best directions themselves.

As a matter of cold, hard, psychological fact, a change in behaviour on the job, for better or worse, means a change in self-concept. The difficulties managers have in behaviour come from their inability to detect change, and from fuzzy thinking behind such comforting, though fallacious notions as, 'You can't teach an old dog new tricks,' or 'She was born that way.'

If, however, a company wants people to grow in a *deep* sense, then something subtle and basic in its

impact is called for in the manager development effort—a change in self-concept. Managers who once were unreliable in their judgement or who lacked drive *grow* toward reliability in judgement or toward stronger drive. Growth in this sense brings observable changes in outward behaviour because each person is now inwardly different—different, for example, in self-perception, in attitude toward job and company as both relate to his or her own life, or in a feeling of responsibility for others. Such growth is as difficult to achieve as it is desirable. It demands the full-fledged participation of the manager.

CONFLICTS

Each human being is several selves, living comfortably in the role of father or mother, husband or wife, business person, golfer, the life of the party, and so on. But if there are conflicts among any of these roles, then discomfort arises. And such conflict brings with it tension, guilt feelings and compensation. By definition, effective, consistent behaviour is integrated behaviour, while unintegrated behaviour is the behaviour of conflict.

UNREALISM

Unrealistic self-appraisal has cost many a manager his or her job. When a manager no longer 'seems up to the job', isn't there often the subtle flavour of unadaptability, or a rigid inability to adjust sights to a new role as times have changed? The more realistic one's view of oneself, the more guaranteed is personal effectiveness.

RESISTANCE

There is one obvious block to growth. By definition, the self-concept is an organisation or patterning of attitudes, habits, knowledge, drives, and the like. And also, by definition, the fact of organisation means a cementing together of all these complex components. When mature people change, therefore, they do so against a natural resistance.

Growth does not proceed in clear-cut, discreet, logical steps, but for the sake of discussion, and understanding, we can postulate a sequence of steps. The first, self-examination, lays the groundwork for insight, without which no growth can occur. Insights—real, genuine glimpses of ourselves as we really are—are reached only with difficulty and sometimes real psychic pain. Then, as individuals raise their sights for themselves, as they get insights into the direction in which they want to grow, as they 'see' themselves in a particular respect they do not like, then they are changing their self-expectations.

What can be done to stimulate such change? In the business context, the *constructive* pointing up of executives' needs for growth by their superiors is a tremendous source of insight. In fact, anything which enables people to get a new perception—reading, observing, participating in clubs—can provide insight into themselves.

Finally, the changes in self-concept that executives undergo must continue primarily through their own self-direction. People will change only if they reach out and appropriate something—a bit of wisdom, a new idea or a new concept—that stretches them, and gives them answers to their own self-generated problem.

Put another way, we might say that, just as learning is impossible without motivation, so real executive development is impossible unless executives seek it. Growing executives are so because they derive their strength and desire and drive from inner, unachieved goals, and their satisfactions from self-realisation. Strong executives fulfil themselves as they live lives that are an unfolding of their potential. The self-concept of the strong executive is a constantly evolving, changing thing as they continuously realise themselves. This is genuine growth.

The difference between a strong person and a weak person may not, in fact, be a difference in ability, or in drive, or in opportunity, but may lie in self-concept. How much do I value my life? What do I want to do with it? What must I do to be myself?