



LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS: THE SELF-AWARE LEADER

Hot buttons – we all have them. And that is ok – just part of the human condition. It is how we adapt to them; how we let them affect our leadership that is important to our leadership credibility.

One of the goals of Strategic Executive Coaching is to help executives make what is apparent even more obvious. This level of self-awareness includes learning a lot more about one's "hot buttons" and developing new, more effective behaviors rather than acting on one's initial reaction to a hot button. This also includes understanding how one's stakeholders react to our ability to adapt.

Two leaders in the same organization, both with apparent hot buttons, both at similar levels in the organization, ended up with very different outcomes as a result of their abilities to demonstrate flexibility and resilience in response to hot buttons.

Every time Alice was in a meeting with her peers, an executive management group, she reacted to a certain peer who hit her hot button. Everyone else in the room would see Alice's reaction coming – tight, red face, and then the emotional outburst attacking the peer's comments. Alice's peers spoke with her about the impact this behavior had on her credibility. Alice decided to pursue executive coaching. Despite Alice's apparent desire to learn, when she received her 360 feedback, she was defensive about the messages. Unfortunately, Alice was not able to hear how to adapt to her hot buttons so they could become assets. As a result, her peers lost confidence in her leadership and eventually she was fired from the company.

Jane, on the other hand, took her feedback seriously. She followed up and probed even deeper with her stakeholders, and learned more about herself and them in the process. Jane's hot button had to do with perceived micromanagement from her boss. She learned how her responses affected others and how to negotiate better outcomes with her boss. A year after her coaching involvement ended formally, she is thriving, has a better relationship with her boss, and has been promoted.

The first step to achieving an outcome like Jane's is to recognize and acknowledge your hot buttons – the things that make you lose your cool or make you uncomfortable. This will go a long way toward improving your chances for success today and in the future.

The second step is to find an alternative response. This allows you to take more deliberate actions. You can decide to take an emotionally intelligent approach when you respond so that your composure, not your reaction, is noticed by others. Note how your new behavior impacts the business and the people around you.

Last but not least, predict and plan for when those hot button might get pushed. Envision yourself engaged in a more effective behavior. Ask yourself: What positive steps can I take to ensure success for the company, my team, and me?

How do you handle your hot buttons? What do you need to plan for so that your reaction does not get in the way of your success?