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The Path To Performance – OP’EEP (Part 2)

Continuing with our discussion on the topic of performance, recall that I presented the four stages on the path to performance—primarily in the workplace, but applicable to any environment. The four stages—code named OP’EEP—are shown in the adjacent sidebar.

The main objectives of each of these stages are to: gain the necessary prerequisite knowledge of a new environment and/or role (stage I); establish yourself and your work style in a manner that creates synergy in the new environment culture (stage II); achieve a series of success stories by continuously overcoming obstacles and challenges (stage III); and attain a level of notable sustained performance that sets you apart (stage IV).

Four-Stage Path to Performance OP’EEP

I - Orientation & Preparation

II - Establishment

III - Endurance

IV - Performance

To progress successfully through all four stages, certain factors remain in play. I refer to them as “factors” but, in reality, they are habits and practices that one cultivates. So what are these factors—you wonder? They aren’t new, and there are three critical ones, namely: Learning, Understanding, and Applying (Practicing).

First, Learning – To achieve a sustainable level of performance in a workplace you need to be continuously learning. Learning, as I define it here, refers to the accumulation of knowledge, which implies knowledge transfer. Right from the first stage on the path to performance—Orientation & Preparation—through to the final stage—Performance—you need to learn new things and acquire additional body of knowledge that will enable you to overcome obstacles, avoid problems, and take on challenges to come.

Second, Understanding – This is an extension of learning, and refers to the ability to comprehend and fully grasp information and knowledge that has been acquired. You will agree that it is possible to acquire knowledge but not fully understand what you’ve learnt. When you acquire new information or knowledge and you develop the ability to adequately understand it, then you are able to effectively use that information in an advantageous and beneficial way.

Author of RESPECT: Gaining It and Sustaining It

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Third, Applying (Practicing) – This third factor refers to the ability to take what you have learnt, with adequate understanding, and apply it to practical situations with success. This ability converts your investment in learning to tangible returns. The inability to ultimately apply what one has learnt is analogous to learning to drive and then never ever driving a vehicle, or learning to play tennis and then never going to a tennis court to play, or learning a trade and never practicing it—why bother!

When you continuously learn—acquire knowledge—then you are informed, when you fully understand what you have learnt then you become enlightened, and when you are able to apply or practice what you have learnt then you become empowered. The path to performance is a path to empowerment and this commands respect—Earned Respect.

Failure to Apply

Failure to attain a level where one is able to apply—put to use—acquired knowledge, or fact, almost always undermines performance. There are several possible reasons for such failure; however, one increasingly common cause is the lack of adequate understanding. Today we observe this phenomenon in various settings – schools, workplaces, personal development, as well as public forums. We also observe it within personal relationships, lending absolute truth to the old adage – *We never learn from our mistakes!*

The consequence of the lack of adequate understanding of knowledge is a lack of empowerment. Knowledge is not necessarily power until it is adequately understood.

Along the four-stage path to performance many people—perhaps most—get stuck in the Endurance stage, the third stage, and never emerge to the Performance stage. They simply grind along day after day riding the ups and downs. Many readers with an active career, or recent career, may relate well to this! Why is this? I have identified two primary (and often hidden) reasons, or pitfalls—and there are certainly others:

- i. a weak Establishment stage
- ii. a conflicting company (workplace) culture



The Establishment stage, as I previously stated, is where you establish yourself—your style, your work ethic, your approach, your limits, and more. This is when your value system emerges and begins to uniquely define who you are and how you will relate to others around you over the long term. If you are a very disciplined person, then your sense of discipline will gradually become visible to others and will be reflected in your work ethic; if you embrace diversity, then your approach will reflect a collaborative style; and so on. If you are able to exercise your value system and subsequently manifest certain aspects of your personal values—especially those relevant and supportive of performance—then you are best positioned to perform at your best. On the other hand, if you aren't able to exercise your value system and, in time, manifest your personal values, then your ability to perform to your potential is hindered—to a small or large degree—and this can negatively impact your experience during the subsequent Endurance stage. Think about this for a moment!

In some cases you may be able to successfully manifest your values during the Establishment and Endurance stages only to realize that they—your personal values—are in significant and constant conflict with the business (workplace) culture and possibly the organization values. For example, you establish a collaborative work style in an environment that promotes individual competition and personal incentives; or you establish a disciplined work ethic within an organizational culture that rewards short term results with minimal accountability. Many people find themselves in this increasingly common situation, where organizational policies, protocols, values, and reward system create an atmosphere—a workplace culture—that suppresses individual and collective performance of employees.

Interestingly enough the reverse may also hold true! You may have a workplace culture that fosters certain values and emphasizes certain work ethics supportive of teamwork, collaboration, and performance, only to find a person—within such an environment—hold a personal value system in significant contrast to the workplace culture. Such an individual would have a difficult time attaining an appreciable level of performance.

These obstacles on the path to performance are worth noting and this knowledge—with adequate understanding—should serve every professional and business owner well during their career development and business development, respectively. (Reader views welcome: ektimis@ntaiwo.com)

Cheers and thank you – N. Taiwo