

Management and our Faulty Perspective on Ego in Business

It's not about leaving your ego at the door: you must refuse to proceed beyond the door without sufficient "Ego Strength".

Shouting the Wrong Instructions

Lots of people will rant about ego having no place at work, how it causes more harm than good. How many times have we been told to "leave your ego at the door"? But people issuing such advice miss the point entirely. And the truth is scary because it's not about killing ego: it's about *strengthening* it!

Ego strength refers to our ability (or lack thereof) to maintain emotional stability and cope with stress. Yet, when referring to a person's ego getting in the way we are discussing a person's pride and their need to save face and protect reputation. Underlying such behavior is the presence or lack of ego strength. And that's what all managers, business students and business schools must focus on: the underlying level of ego strength, building it, and using it. It's not about leaving your ego at the door, it's about refusing to proceed beyond the door *without* sufficient ego-strength.

Toward Building Ego Strength

I have dedicated the first chapter of **If You Cannot Manage Yourself You Cannot Manage Others** to precisely this point: building ego strength while at the same time putting the personal life of the manager into order. The book encourages managers to move toward an internal locus of control, to become more proactive and flexible in their thinking and actions, to open themselves up to change and lean away

from pessimism toward optimism. In discussing this topic, I point out several times in the book that the common pitfalls in life and in managing others are external locus of control, reacting, rigidity, negativity, resistance to change, defensiveness, etc. - all signs of a low ego strength.

Any person watching others around them will see how a failure on the part of those others to move away from such attitudes and behaviors keeps them trapped in lives that change little for the better and casts them as poor choices for promotion to managerial positions.

Waiting for the Business Schools to Catch Up

Until the business schools come around to teaching correct and proper management skills, the onus is on each manager or would-be manager to improve their own people-oriented skills. You must take time to reflect upon your own behavior thereby learning about yourself. This is important because ego-defense mechanisms are unconscious - you will be unaware you are using them until they are pointed out to you, until you see the behavior in others, or until you analyze past situations and your own behavior in an honest and meaningful way.

Always Start with YOU: the Manager

I conclude my discussion of the topic in the book with what I believe is an extremely valuable insight and guide for any manager: You have to allow for the possibility of including yourself as part of any performance *problem* your subordinates have and therefore have to be able to include your own actions and behaviors as part of the solution.

This can be hard for managers to take: accepting they are often a part of the problem, have contributed to it

coming about, and more. Far too many dive in seeking to implement a solution.

As readers will soon come to see, one of the golden rules in **Just Manage THEM!** *Effective People Management for Today's Manager* – the second book in the “Just Manage It!” series – the starting place should always be with yourself: how might I have contributed to this, how might I have failed to get out of my employees way, etc?

Allowing an underperforming subordinate comment on *your* behavior when discussing a problem is essential and takes good ego-strength.



Colm McCormack has lectured in Management, Strategic Management, and Leadership on MBA and continuing education programs. He has consulted for numerous companies and Mentored business owners. He is the author of the “**Just Manage It!**” series of Business & Management books. Visit www.ColmMcCormack.com to download FREE chapters, to view key concepts and models, and to purchase Books from the series.