



EXPERTS AT DEVELOPING CORPORATE LEADERSHIP TALENT

LEADERSHIP COACHING NEWSLETTER

This Month's Topic: **Judging a Book by its Cover**

September 2009

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You're probably among the hundreds of millions of YouTube surfers who have watched the Susan Boyle phenomenon. If you haven't had the chance to see Susan Boyle on YouTube, you've probably heard about her on the news. In case you've been away from the planet for the last few months and don't know what we're talking about, Susan Boyle is a simple Scottish woman who became the most recent musical wonder on the British television show called "Britain's Got Talent."

Why did Susan Boyle become a phenomenon in a matter of seconds and why did her fame spread all over the world in the blink of an eye? Because she went against all odds. Because she broke paradigms. Because of the uncomfortable discovery of the obvious: we should not judge a book or the gifts in it simply by its cover.

A participant in one of our recent leadership retreats, when we brought the Susan Boyle topic up for discussion said, "The overnight phenomenon happens in the artistic world, but there are no Susan Boyles in the corporate world."

It made me wonder if he was right.

In the musical world in particular, all you have to do is open your mouth and people can judge the enormity of your talent. It is pretty obvious, and it's almost impossible to deny a gift like that. The situation is much more complex and subtle in corporate life; talent recognition depends on much more than just opening your mouth.

From a management standpoint, managers need to recognize and create the conditions for their employees' talents to be displayed and developed. Many of us admit that if someone does not fit "the seat on our bus," or our parameters on how an individual should look and behave, we may judge them unfairly just like we might have first judged Susan Boyle before she opened her mouth to sing.

Susan Boyle had a lot going against her. She was judged and overlooked initially for living in a small, unassuming village in Scotland. She generated very low expectations when she first walked out on stage due to her appearance, dress, and unsophisticated image. When she first spoke as she introduced herself, the audience twittered with disbelief that this woman was actually on stage in the first place.

I wonder if in the corporate world, we might overlook talent, especially if it is wrapped in a different packaging than we are used to seeing.

Just like Susan Boyle has an extraordinary talent, it is quite possible that our prejudices color our perceptions not allowing us to discover someone with an extraordinary talent and potential right under our nose.



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On Saturday May 30th, 2009, Susan Boyle came in second in the season finale of "Britain's Got Talent." There is no question she was finally given the opportunity to shine, showcase her talent and obtaining her well deserved recognition on the way.

It is up to us as leaders in our organizations to see the greatness in each of our employees, even if they are wrapped in a different kind of package. And if any one of our employees is not shining brightly enough in their current role or job, look first at ourselves to see what our responsibility is in their lack of success before we move them, replace them, re-structure them, or ultimately let them go. It is our responsibility as leaders to showcase the strengths of our employees and to position them strategically so they organization can thrive more and they can feel as if they are truly contributing to the best of their ability.

Wouldn't it be interesting if we actually found a superb talent in our organization that we didn't know we had? What would happen if we actually went looking for this talent among our own by just asking, or just giving someone the chance to shine? You just might be very pleasantly surprised. Not everyone is "groomed" into the right slot.

Recommendations

Recommended reading: [The Talent Management Handbook: Creating Organizational Excellence by Lance Berger and Dorothy Berger.](#)

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