

Management In Real Life

by Kevin Herring

Now that the dust has settled from The Apprentice finale and Bill has taken his victory lap, let's look at what the final two candidates really brought to the table.

In one corner, we have Kwame, a Harvard MBA and successful young stock broker. He is calm, patient, analytical, exceptionally polite, and gets along well with everyone. As a leader, he taps into people's skills early and trusts them to get things done.

His weaknesses? Poor judgment selecting team members and failing to confront performance problems. By allowing an untrustworthy team member to handle critical tasks and not confronting the problem, Kwame nearly blew the project and appeared disorganized in front of Trump. In the middle of the project, he nearly lost the respect of other team members who expected him to address the issue.

In the opposite corner we have Bill, a Loyola business school graduate who launched a successful cigar sales business. Bill is analytical, constantly sizing things up to resolve problems. He's a get-things-done person who takes charge and makes sure everything is running smoothly.

Bill's weaknesses? He's a micro-manager whose constant questioning of his team members drove them all crazy. Trying to personally tend to every detail and solve every problem, Bill became visibly rattled. At times, he appeared disorganized walking in and out of the clubhouse multiple times checking on details.

The Donald clearly likes a take-charge person. On that point, Bill fits the bill, so to speak. Bill's hands-on, controlling style appears consistent with Trump's no-nonsense behavior in the boardroom, so it's no surprise that he was picked.

The prognosis for success? According to research, a leader's cognitive abilities can account for as much as 50% improvement in profitability. Both Bill and Kwame are sharp, but here's the differentiator: Leaders competent in soft skills such as self management, self-awareness, social awareness and relationship management can add as much as 390% more profit to an organization. Self management skills, in particular, have the greatest impact.

Self management includes exercising self-control, living one's values, being open and authentic, being able to handle sudden changes, rolling with the punches, maintaining optimism, and acting with high personal standards and goals.

Research has shown that people have much more difficulty developing many of these critical soft skills – something to keep in mind when considering how Bill's operating practices affected others.

Considering the soft skills of the candidates, it's a tough choice. Personally, I would take Kwame. His self management skills are strong and he will have no trouble learning to confront performance issues in the future.

Bill is a strong individual contributor. I would want him on my team for sure. But as a leader, his employees will likely struggle with his need for control. They might tolerate his management style, but lose personal motivation.

As the hiring manager, where will Trump end up? Will he win with Bill or be forced to pull out his trademark, "You're fired?"

Both Bill and Kwame have tremendous promise, and like the rest of us, have some things to work on. Hopefully, both will continue to learn – a critical soft skill - and continue to be successful.

Trying it on for fit: Whenever you hire, avoid the temptation to hire totally on technical ability thinking the candidate can pick up the rest later. And include an assessment of soft skills in your selection process.

For your personal development, find out how you are doing with these skills. You can get feedback through a neutral third party such as a consultant, a self assessment tool, a structured 360 degree feedback process, or by simply asking people you trust for their opinions about how you are doing. Develop a solid plan for improvement and assess your progress frequently and regularly.

Send an e-mail and let me know what you learn from your experiences. I would love to hear from you!

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