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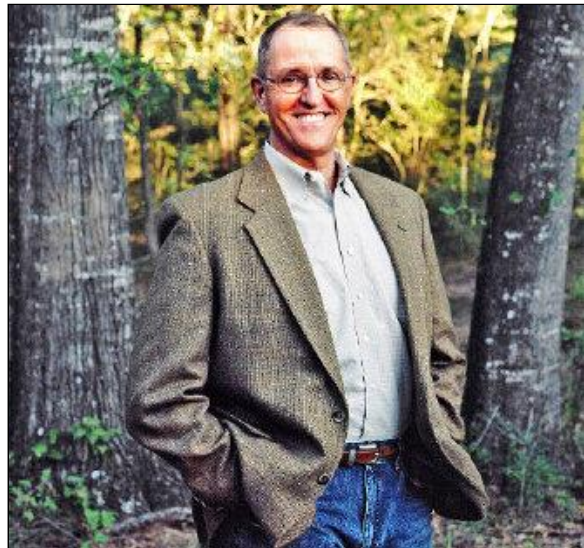
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The higher you go, the less feedback you get from others

Towards a better understanding of the constraints to growth.



Flip Flippen, author of 'The Flip Side: Break Free of the Behaviours That Hold You Back.'

D. Murali
G. Ramesh

What determines your success? "It is overcoming your personal constraints that determines your success, rather than just playing to your strengths," says Flip Flippen, author of The Flip Side: Break Free of the Behaviours That Hold You Back (www.HachetteBookGroupUSA.com).

The book is a guide to 'top ten killer constraints' that confront us at home and at work. These constraint types come with snazzy names such as the Bulldozers or the dominant ones; the Marshmallows that thrive in nurturing; the Quick draws, who are impulsive; the Critics, who nitpick; the Ostriches, characterised by low self-confidence; the Flatliners displaying low passion; the Turtles, resistant to change; the Volcanoes, visibly aggressive; and so on.

Personal growth, achieved by overcoming constraints, is more than just personal, argues the author, during the course of a recent e-mail interaction with The New Manager. "It is not 'about me,' but it is about those whom I serve and care about. When I don't grow, it has a tremendous impact on others. Usually that impact is not good unless I am giving them my best – which I can't do without dealing with my personal

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constraints.”

Flippen heads The Flippen Group, which he founded in 1990 with a simple philosophy: 'We grow people'. A fast-growing leadership development organisation in the US, the company's educational processes and curricula are in use in 5,000 school districts and campuses in 42 states, claims www.flipsidebook.com. Excerpts from the interview:

Is there a constraint that stands in the way of our identifying the constraints?

Lack of feedback is a big block to self-awareness and self-knowledge, which are so critical to any growth process. For most people, the higher they go in an organisation, the less “feedback” they get from others. Also, a lot of the feedback they do get is not about things they can do better or things they need to consider doing differently, but rather about how “great” they are at something.

Senior executives tend to get less critical information than do most others. This is especially true in Indian culture. Knowing who you are and how you are perceived and behaving is critical to personal growth.

This is really the focus of parenting — helping our children grow into productive, appropriate adults. The problem is that we don't get that kind of information as adults. Consequently, often we are doing things that are not the best, but others are not telling us about it.

Even after knowing one's personal constraints, can things just continue to be the same?

Yes, there is the huge temptation to stay the same. Virtually all of us look to blame others and blame situations, and even though I fully acknowledge those factors, I think, taken too far, these thoughts create a victim mentality. I worked with a teacher recently who was very frustrated with her principal and with her colleagues and so on. At some point I had to ask, “Whose classroom is this?”

You have to accept responsibility, and you have to want to change. What our data has shown is that after a certain age it is more difficult for people to significantly raise their personal drive or achievement scores.

But deep-rooted habits will resist change. How can one tackle the resistance?

The best way to tackle change of any sort is through our behaviours. It is certainly important to change our thinking about many things, but a faster and perhaps easier way is to focus on specific behaviours.

Let me give you an example: If you are trying to develop higher self-confidence (Ostrich) you would want to focus on very specific behaviours. You would want to go into meetings standing tall, smiling and greeting people in the room by name, introducing yourself to new people and speaking up in meetings when appropriate, even if it is to simply affirm someone else who has spoken up.

Focusing on very specific behaviours is the best way to make change occur. Staying the same in a rapidly changing world is the best way to get left behind.

The more we fight a particular behaviour, the more powerful it gets, doesn't it?

I agree. That's why I don't think that fighting with wrong behaviours is a good thing. That is not to suggest that we should simply "go with the flow" and do the wrong things. But it is to say that we should look at more positive behaviours that we can put in their place.

For example, if you are losing your temper and being rude or speaking to someone in a rude way, you will need to then be able to go to that person and acknowledge what you were doing and take full responsibility for your actions, without blaming the other person. Then, you will want to strongly consider asking forgiveness for the way you spoke to the person. Moving in a positive way is extremely important for personal growth.

So it really depends on how you fight! If you don't have a plan of attack, then you're just throwing punches in the wind. But if you really wrestle with your constraints, while at the same time not losing your strengths, then it's a fight worth having.

Does silence have any role in overcoming constraints?

If the personal constraints that you are working on have anything to do with hurting others or dominating others in a bullying fashion, silence is a great approach to personal growth.

What, according to you, is creativity?

I look at creativity as having several different parts. First, there is that creativity that comes from being able to see things that don't really exist at present. You might even call this being "visionary," which can include everything from decorating a room that doesn't exist to being able to create a new product line.

The second type of creativity comes from being able to realign objects, thoughts, products, processes or resources in such a way as to create a new event. For example, taking a kite and a surfboard and putting them together to create kite-surfing.

The third type of creativity comes from being able to see what is missing in an idea or product, and adding it. Or perhaps in some cases, it might be eliminating something that didn't need to be there for the new product.

Creativity is an incredible resource, and you find it most often in children. However, much of education takes it out of them and replaces their creativity with "getting it right," which is counterproductive. I believe that being able to effectively teach creativity, while at the same time learning the basics, is the key to growing a great economy.

How would you define success and happiness? Are they tied to each other? Can't unsuccessful people be happy?

I would not separate these two thoughts. I personally believe that successful people are defined as those who have ordered their lives in such a way that they are "spent well." By that I simply mean that those people have the opportunity to do things with their lives that have purpose, and they do those things well. There is honour in work well done, no matter what the nature of the work. Life is not about material possessions,

but rather how you use your abilities and how you treat others. I have found that people who live this way experience happiness that is not tied to external things, but rather to the deeper things of the heart.

Can talent breed arrogance?

Oftentimes it does. One thing that I think we should all keep close to our thoughts is that the talents we have are truly gifts. For the most part, you probably didn't do anything to get the basic talents you have. A person's arrogance is usually a result of someone not being in touch with that thinking. Second, it's what we do with our talents that really determine whether or not we are successful with them. I personally believe that if you are truly successful, then it will show through how you treat others with graciousness and respect.

Most people exist as they are, with their strengths and weaknesses. Is it wrong? What can shake them up?

I do not believe that simply existing is really living. If our life is the greatest gift we have, then we should always be looking for ways to be the best that we can be. This is not so much a matter of someone being "wrong," but rather a question of "what could be."

Life's events tend to shake up most people. However, I think that the brighter the people are, the more likely they are to look into the future and see the long-term consequences (both good and bad) of their present actions and thoughts. I, personally, don't want to be "shaken up," but I cherish gaining insight into how to make life better. I want to be better because my life affects my family, friends and employees, as well as the larger community.

How would you deal with a 'Volcano' and an 'Iceberg' in an office?

The Indian culture can, at times, be very deferring to those in authority. This in itself makes it difficult for people to see how they can speak with someone in authority about something in their behaviour that needs to be different. Given that thought, let me respond.

Volcanoes are difficult people. They are usually so caught up in themselves that they don't see and often don't care about the damage they do to others. It is important that when you are dealing with Volcanoes you draw good boundaries so that they know they can't get away with treating you any way they choose. You can respectfully ask, "Do you think it is acceptable to treat me the way you do?" "Is there a better way for us to handle this than to lose our temper?" Asking questions and helping angry people see what they are doing is the first step. Then you draw boundaries and let them know that you won't be participating in the discussion when this happens. You have to use considerable tact when doing this, or else you will see them upset again.

Icebergs are a different group. They simply aren't nurturing or sensitive to others. In fact, life is usually about them, and that is incredibly selfish. If you are looking to them to get approval or affirmations, you will have to find another source for that input. Generally, icebergs aren't encouraging or considerate of others. If they don't see that they are this way, they are not likely to change.

What are you currently working on?

We are working on the research for the next book at this time. We are writing about 'The Constraints of Leadership' and it will have numerous examples of leadership constraints and the impact those constraints have had on others. Also, we are presenting several thoughts about how to 'grow greatness' in those around us. We hope that this will speak to the global need we have for leadership that is not power-based, but rather about how to more effectively serve. The data regarding highly successful companies indicates that those who rise to the top in performance will be the ones that can attract and retain high performers, while at the same time continuing to raise the level of customer service both inside and outside the company. It is exciting to see so many young emerging professionals who see how this leads to high-performing companies.

Any thoughts on the Indian mindset and how your ideas can be applied here?

I've been very impressed as I've followed the way the Indian economy continues to develop and grow. In an increasingly competitive global market it's imperative that one is able to identify and break behaviours that hold you back – after all, "Those with the least constraints... win." I've also noticed that it is particularly hard for senior executives to get critical feedback in some Asian cultures. It's important that senior leaders invite feedback from their colleagues and direct reports, as I've found it's almost impossible to self-assess by yourself. I am excited to see how India continues to develop and grow leaders that can take the country to even greater heights.

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