



Mobley's Musings- Got My Goat

As a child I recall my mother saying, "He really got my goat today!" When I asked what she meant the answer was never very satisfactory. Afterall, we didn't own any goats.

As I got older, I realized she meant that someone had irritated her or "pushed her buttons" – another phrase not meant to be taken literally.

Recently I watched a movie about racehorses and learned that they are often high strung, and a goat can serve as a comfort animal to calm them down. Sometimes unscrupulous opponents would steal a horse's goat the night before a race to upset the horse and cause it to perform badly the next day. That's the source of the "got my goat" expression.

Do you have a goat – a resource that helps you when you feel overwhelmed or out of sorts? A person, animal, or activity that can help calm you and center your mind is a powerful resource when times are stressful. For some, a sport like golf, tennis, horseback riding, or basketball releases tension and nervous energy. For others, a hobby that requires patience and careful attention like painting, woodworking, or playing a musical instrument can quiet the mind. Meditation, yoga, and prayer can also deliver tranquility and comfort.

Having multiple calming resources is useful in case one isn't doing the trick. That way if someone gets your goat you have others in reserve.



Ask Sandy How to be an influencer

Many of my clients tell me about the pivotal people in their lives — friends and coworkers who inspired them to grow and become who they are today. Carrie says her mentor recognized her gifts even when she could not. She had been writing analytical papers for her organization and her mentor noticed that while other writers were good at presenting the data, Carrie was particularly skilled in explaining the impact of the analysis, able to tell a story through the data and analysis that lay people could understand. Her mentor saw this strategic ability and encouraged her to pursue roles that played to that strength.

When these clients ask me how they too can become key influencers, I tell them it comes down to paying close attention to their staff members, noticing where they excel and what work gives them the most enjoyment. For staff who work remotely, leaders can ask them directly what they feel they are best at and what they love to do; usually the two areas intersect, but not always. Once that sweet spot is identified, the next step is to look for opportunities where those gifts can be applied to the greatest effect.

Alexia, who worked in finance at a large company, always remembered others' birthdays and found ways to celebrate them in unique ways. Her manager noticed Alexia's ability to sense what others needed and asked her to create team building sessions for the staff. Alexia loved the assignment and proved to be very good at it despite having little formal training. Her manager suggested she might like to work in human resources. Alexia hadn't considered HR as a career path, but with her manager's help she got a job in training development, where she is thriving. Alexia was a good finance manager, but she is a great HR manager.

If you want to become the kind of influencer who inspired you to greatness, observe your team members. Are they fully engaged, or do they dispatch some tasks quickly and become happily absorbed in others? Is there a different role that will allow them to perform at their best consistently? Even if you do not become the single most pivotal person in another's career, you may develop a reputation for guiding your staff in their current roles and identifying positions that make the best use of their talents. Instead of concentrating on changing one person's life, consider inspiring your whole team to greatness.

If you have any questions you'd like Sandy to address in future newsletters, email them to sandy@learningadvantageinc.com



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Playing Hunger Games at Work

As if work isn't stressful enough, imagine having a co-worker, direct report, or boss who views work like it's the Hunger Games: a brutal, fight-to-the-death contest with only one winner who allows their own teammate to be sacrificed.

Over the years I have seen several reasons for this attitude, but they all tend to stem from either personal or organizational influences.

On the **personal** side, people who are overly ambitious, competitive, or have a scarcity mindset — the fear they may never have enough — can embrace a Hunger Games attitude. They may have grown up in a family where competition was encouraged or are simply aggressive by nature. In school they may have played competitive sports, run for class office, or joined the debate team. And as they move into management positions, they may continue this behavior by competing with other teams instead of collaborating, setting up win/lose scenarios for team members, and giving the same assignment to multiple people to see who does it fastest or best. Even people who are natural collaborators realize they must change their behavior or lose out when this person is in charge.

But people don't have to be in leadership positions to wield this attitude. A team member who is critical of their colleagues and direct reports, puts others down, doesn't share information, and takes credit for work the team did even when they had nothing to do with it may be driven by a winner-take-all mentality.

Organizational causes of hyper-competitive behaviors include disproportionately rewarding individuals instead of teams and adhering to a strict up-or-out policy, despite fewer opportunities for promotion at higher levels. In many organizations, employees at each level are assessed using a bell curve where roughly 15 percent are top performers at the right side of the curve, 15 percent are poor performers at the left side of the curve, and the bulk of employees make up the hump in the middle. The higher salaries and bonuses go to the top performers while the bottom performers may be asked to leave.

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