

Leadership Information Overload (Episode 250)

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Welcome back, I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec. This week, we're going to talk about information overload, but particularly as it relates to leadership and styles of leadership and leadership challenges. We have in the past little while talked about the amount of information that is available these days and the different ways that you can get information. And this is a topic that was suggested to me because of someone who was observing a new leader and qualified to be a leader at that point in time, who was so excited about this new leadership role. He was pulling in information from everywhere and just trying out the ideas. So you see a video one week that was some respected leadership guru talking about this is how you should lead your teams. So you do that for up to three months and then he'd see or hear something else and think I'll try that now and the team, were at the point where they felt that they would come in and say, I wonder what the latest idea is this week.

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You know, what management system will we have this week that we have to work towards. And I think that that was the trigger for the manager up the line to say, we need to stop and have a look at where you're getting your information from and how you're filtering it. And I think the filtering of the information was the big issue. So if you're in a situation where you've got lots of information coming at you about all sorts of new ways to do things, different lifestyle or any other way of getting

information. How do you filter the information so that you can try things out because obviously you want to try new things, that might be an improvement, or they might not. Although we're going to focus on leadership, it is a system of information management that could cover lots of other topics as well. I think the starting point would be, what is it I want the information for because any topic when you start searching for it, you could spend months and years still getting information. There's speakers, there's books, there's everything. So I have to define what am I looking for and why and how am I going to use it?

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We know with leadership firstly the most important thing to know is you've got to be yourself first and foremost. Yes, you can look at role models, you can know what sort of style might work. But the other thing is be yourself, but also your leadership style overall will have a certain picture. But individually, each time you practice a different style. For example, if you talk about, let's think aloud around the management table about this topic and you're getting opinions and we're gathering information, that's collaborative, that's great, you're getting all of that and then there is a point where you have to make a decision. So that is enough information gathering and now we've got three options and we're going to go with option one because of this, so that's leadership. Again, it's not dictating it is what's expected of you as a leader in that circumstance. So your leadership style will change from situation to situation while still being true to your basic leadership, integrity, people focus, customer focus, shareholder focused, etcetera, environmentally focused, all of

those things, they are the core of your leadership.

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But how you would act in a situation that can change? The same as some criticism such as I've got an open style open door policy. You can ring me or come to see me any time, but that's not exactly true. What you're saying is, I'm approachable and I'd love to talk to you. You can't just walk into someone's office when they've got someone else in there, for example. So you've got to have the subtleties as well of good leadership, respect for each other and all those sorts of things. But as far as information don't go into analysis paralysis so that you get so much information that it really leads you nowhere and then you actually think what did I want it for again? So define why first and for what purpose and out of all that information you might find three relevant things and then you think about them, think about them for your situation, then apply some judgment and execution of that, not just take it because some guru said that because that guru would have said it for a different circumstance to you.

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So it has to change if you also say whatever you do don't do this and some of them say do's and dont's in leadership again, don't be so black and white about it because your situation is unique. Your circumstances are unique. The people you're working with are unique to your situation and the environment. Again, unless you apply your own judgment and your own application of your style to it, you can't just take that data and say but it worked for joe blogs. Who's the guru? Well yes, but

there's more to it than that. I'm going to focus on the filters and how you determine what the filters are as well as how you judge and measure whether what you've taken on when you filtered all of that information has been successful or not. So the first filter has to come out of doing, you guessed it, a swat analysis on yourself on your leadership skills.

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So you're going to look at you as a leader because it's what we're talking about today is what are your strengths as a leader? So these are the areas where you already know that you've got skills and abilities and you probably don't need to focus so much on doing anything about those in the short term. What are your weaknesses and the weaknesses combined with the opportunities will mean that that's where you start to filter and the threats obviously the things over which you've got no control. So list them and that might be things like generally it's always the external things. So it's changes to regulations, changes to the business ownership, those sorts of things over which you have no control. But you need to be aware that they might happen and that they might influence what you're doing in terms of your management style, your leadership style. But it's the weaknesses and the opportunities that you need to think about and that's where the filter comes in. So if I've got a weakness in a particular area of leadership and perhaps that's my interpersonal skills, I'm not a good interpersonal communicator, shall we say?

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That is a weakness in a leadership framework because I do

need to have a good rapport with all of my team members. So the opportunity out of that is that I need to improve. That's not a leadership skill, it's a personal skill, it's a personal area. So don't always look for the leadership gurus to tell you how to improve that because they're as Fulyana said they are telling you in the framework that might be very different to yours. So don't limit yourself to the recognized gurus of those areas. Look across all sorts of industries, Look across all sorts of situations and be very specific about the skill that you want to develop. So that you put that filter over the information that you're being overloaded with in that sense if we looked at it's my interpersonal communication that I need to improve and I need to improve it in a time frame. So I want to know that my communication skills have been improved in six months time.

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How are you going to measure it? You know that you feel now they're not as good as they could be. You need a baseline that says they're at this point, what the team thinks they're at this point, ask the team to assess you, assess yourself whatever it is, put it at a level and in a time frame that you said you filter information and you take on board one idea at a time because otherwise you can't measure it, you don't know what helped, or what didn't help if you do more than one thing at a time. And then at the end of that time period that you've set yourself and be realistic about the time, if it's interpersonal communication, it's going to take six months before they forget what you used to be like and they recognize what you are now. If you're using external measures, so the team measures rather than yourself and it's going to take some time for you to recognize that that has improved. You're going to measure it. So you set yourself

at a baseline and you want it to be two or three points higher. How is that going to be determined?

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Is it because they come to you more often, you get less frustrated with them, you feel like they understand what you're asking, all of those sorts of things, you need to be very clear about what you're measuring and how you're measuring it. Just going on a from that, it's not going to work, it's not going to necessarily work for the team because they don't know what you're doing. You need to say to them, I've identified that I need this skill developed and so I'm going to ask your help in telling me if I'm getting it right or not, Don't leave them in the dark. Don't let them think that you're just trying out all these theories to see which one works because they are exposed to all of that and they have to adjust themselves to that changed person that you are. They might be really happy with the way you're doing it. You might not need to do very much at all, but it's better to know and that might be their view of you as a leader of them. You might still feel that you need to develop some things, but don't try that on them. If they're happy with what you're doing, don't use them as the guinea pigs. Don't test out your ideas on people who are already happy with how you lead them and if you have enough confidence between you and the team, they will tell you when they think you need to change or do something a bit differently.

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If they're a good team. I guess that the rider on all of that is the communication side of things is that they know what you're

doing and why you're doing it and that you are not just using them as the test case, you can say to them, I'm just bombarded with all this information about what a good leader is and so I'm going to set up this model. I'm going to try and work this way. I need your help to keep me on track or to tell me whether it's working or not or the information that you get, you think might be useful for me, but then tell them, bring them on the journey with you because not only are you improving your interaction with them and your leadership skills, but you're training them to think like a leader as well. And so you hand on that legacy for them to continue on in that vein, improving themselves as well. Extend that way of thinking and measuring to the rest of the people you interact with outside your own team. So usually you do things like a 360 degree feedback that will tell you what your boss is thinking of you, how you're perceived by your boss, how you're perceived by your colleagues, how you're perceived by your team, how you're perceived may be extended to people outside that, the customer for example.

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Again, they're different. Again, in a sense of them, you've got to know that these are horses for courses. So with your team it might be much more communication, more attention to detail going into more explanation or understanding so that you're all on the same page. For your boss, it might be more high level, it might be executive summary what we have to do, where we are at and how we're getting there etcetera. For the customer it's what's the benefit for them, that sort of thing. So you will get a collection of views of you as a leader. Sometimes they look like they're conflicting. Like if your bosses say you pay too

much attention to detail, not strategic enough then that you will take onboard obviously. And you will look at it. I am strategic but am I not communicating with him or her that way? Am I presenting information in a sense that seems more tactical than strategic etcetera.

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The feedback across the board through a 360 survey or just sometimes by listening to what people are trying to tell you and then you can take that on board but don't try to be the same in every circumstance because you can't. For your team it might be one solution and again, within your team communication with the individuals, you might change it slightly to suit the best way to communicate for that individual. Another tip that I would give you is from my own experiences. I have a number of email groups that send information about leadership topics and management. Generally I don't read them all. Certainly, I'm happy to for them to come in and I see what the subject line is and I think - do I need that information this week? I don't, so I won't read it because it's a distraction. If I read it, I start down a different thinking path. But I know that the information is there. I keep them all in a folder in the email so that if I'm looking for something I can go back and say well there might be something there and I'll do a search for a keyword or I'll remember that there was an email or a video a month or so ago that talked about that and so I'll go back to that.

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So it's about yes, you get lots of information and it is

information overload. But you don't have to read it all at the time it comes in or at the time that you see it. It's for a purpose. So you search for it when you particularly want to look at some aspect of your leadership or your management skills in relation to the SWOT analysis you've done and your continuous improvement. I'll just get that in now. All right. I think we've covered that topic for you particularly well today in different ways. We'll leave it there. I'm Kim Baillie she's Fulyana Orsborn, this is Inside Exec.