

How to Manage Your Inner Team

As I settle down to write another article, I feel under pressure, aware that the somewhat jaded and cynical business manager I used to be in my former career hasn't time to hang around long. I need to convince her of the commercial value of my argument.

However, the flexible worker, who is also part of me, seizes my attention because she has seen a flash of sunshine outside. She declares that if I break off early and go for a walk, I'll work far more productively tomorrow. This interruption alarms the efficient marketing officer in me, who insists I stick to the deadline we agreed. Meanwhile, in the background, I can hear my finance director continuing to nag me, as she has done all day, to make that call about the unexpected invoice received this morning.

Such headaches are a nuisance not only for an independent business owner. All of us lead lives so complex that our greatest challenge often comes from being called upon to perform very many different characters, in turn the visionary leader, the supportive colleague, the conscientious supplier, the exacting customer, the responsible parent, the family's financial adviser, the occasional golfer, the gourmet chef, the head gardener ... the list is endless.

Disagreement arising between members of any team is common and usually causes nothing worse than a distraction or a moment's delay in weighing up the options. However, when no-one else is involved, inner conflicts can become so great they degenerate into indecision and procrastination – the dilemma of being in “two minds” about something. Worse, we may be baffled when we notice we are saying one thing and doing another. Despite our best intentions we decide to relax rather than visit the gym, or put in extra hours at

the office instead of going home so we can kick a ball around with the kids.

More severe problems result when we continue to undervalue or override one of our personalities, because they each play a valuable role in serving us well. If left ignored, a part of us will persist in bothering us until we notice it, making us do something “completely out of character”, like bursting into a fit of temper unexpectedly, or causing us to fall ill after a period of prolonged stress. It is surprising that organisations do not take personal incongruence more seriously because it contributes to some very costly problems -

- **40 million working days lost each year to absenteeism, costing the UK economy approx. £12 billion**
- **Of these, 12.8 million lost days attributed to stress, depression and anxiety (2004)**
- **Over a hundred staff a year dismissed for fraud from every large organisation (CIFAS)**

The solution lies in using management skills as effectively with our selves (sic) as with others, to ensure that our inner team is also pulling together in the same direction. From our experience of workplace conflict we understand the importance of integrating the different needs and expectations of team members, of balancing the strengths and weaknesses of individuals. Applying this concept to our selves may seem strange but it is implied in the familiar term “self management”.

Here are some questions for effective team playing:

1. *How many inner team members do you have? Do you know all their names? How well have you got to know them? Whom do you like and dislike most?*
2. *How are they doing? Does anyone need coaching or a little encouragement? Do any of them deserve promotion? Are any ready for retirement?*
3. *How exactly are any difficult team members behaving? What is the point they are trying to make heard? Have you been showing them enough appreciation lately for the role they play in your life?*
4. *Is your team working well together? Can you come up with a better way of negotiating between any disagreeing parties so they can all keep you healthy and working productively?*

Reflecting upon these questions raises a further one – Which part of us is it that observes our different personalities? There are times we know we can “lose our selves”, for example, when we gaze into a clear night sky, watch the flames of a fire, listen to uplifting music, or stand by the enervating roar of an ocean. In such moments we are able to experience who exists at the core of our selves, inside our many different social skins, and this brings a profound sense of restoration and well-being.