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The danger in believing your own press...

By Paperitalo Staff

Sometimes it is called, “drinking your own bathwater.” In general, it is about thinking you are great, important and all knowing. It always blows up. Sometimes it is because when others give us faint praise, we begin to believe what they are saying.

Schools and associations are terrible about believing their own press. The absolute top notch best managers I know in this industry never attended a pulp and paper school, either as an undergrad or graduate student, and never darkened the door of one technical conference. I’ll quickly say doing those things does not make one a bad manager, in fact, I know many people who have done so and it gives them a much better chance at a great career. However, it is not the only way to the top.

I will further hasten to say I have supported the pulp and paper schools vigorously and will continue to support them. Had I known about them when I was in high school, I would have applied to one of them.

But again, this column is about believing your own press or those who praise you shamelessly. I personally don’t think I am guilty of this now and I don’t plan to be in the future. Notice I did not say anything about the past!

Additionally, I have been careful to not say you shouldn’t try to make your own press, so to speak. It is just the issue of believing it yourself is where I caution you.

I have had two great friends down through my years in the industry. One I hired on three different occasions. The other I have willingly let myself work for many times, both involving a paycheck and on a volunteer basis. Interestingly, early in their careers, both worked in military intelligence, which gave them a great skill set in understanding people.

This attribute, besides just genuinely liking these people, is an important part of our business relationship over the years and leads to their most important quality. Down through the decades, and I have known them both since about 1977, they have been fearless in one thing they have shared with me. Neither has ever been afraid to be completely candid with me and tell me when I am messing up.

Once I hired one of these gentlemen as the human resource manager when I was charged with growing an engineering firm. When you are a leader, especially the leader of a group of people organized for their technical and mental skills, you can quickly create a mess if you are not careful. Some of my most cherished moments are when this colleague would come into my office, shut the door, and tell me how I had completely misread an issue. Don't get me wrong—he did not always sway me—but we would have a vigorous and respectful conversation. Often I changed course based on his insight; yet sometimes I did not.

If you are in a leadership role and do not have someone close to you who can tell you when you are messing up without fear of retribution, you are missing a great management tool. And, it needs to be said, we are not talking about a “snoop” here—we are talking about someone who can look at the big picture and see things you can't see. Such a perspective is invaluable.

For safety this week, constructive correction in our safety meetings is vital. Don't quickly dismiss the questions or the criticism.

Be safe and we will talk next week. ##