Managing Oneself (Please read for Jan. 12)

It has been said that one cannot be good at managing others until one is good at managing oneself. Below are excerpts from an article on personal management, which proposes that management success will be for those who know themselves--their strengths, how they perform and how they learn, and what their values are. Read and be prepared to discuss these concepts in class on Thursday, Jan. 13. (Vicky's paraphrasings are in [brackets]).


"History's great achievers--a Napoleon, a daVinci, a Mozart--have always managed themselves. That, in large measure, is what makes them great achievers. But they are rare exceptions, so unusual both in their talents and their accomplishments to be considered outside the boundaries of ordinary human existence. Now, most of us, even those of us with modest endowments, will have to learn to manage ourselves..."

[Know your strengths]

"Most people think they know what they are good at. They are usually wrong...and yet, a person can perform only from strength. One cannot build performance on weaknesses, let alone on something one cannot do at all.
"Throughout history, people had little need to know their strengths. A person was born into a position and a line of work: the peasant's son would also be a peasant, the artisan's daughter, an artisan's wife, and so on. But now people have choices. We need to know our strengths in order to know where we belong.
"The only way to discover your strengths is through feedback analysis. Whenever you make a key decision or take a key action, write down what you expect will happen. Nine or 12 months later, compare the actual results with your expectations...
"Several implications for action follow from feedback analysis. First and foremost, concentrate on your strengths. Put yourself where your strengths can produce results.
"Second, work on improving your strengths. Analysis will show where you need to improve skills or acquire new ones. It will also show the gaps in your knowledge--and those can usually be filled...
"Third, discover where your intellectual arrogance is causing disabling ignorance and overcome it...[Also], it is essential to remedy your bad habits--the things you do or fail to do that inhibit your effectiveness and performance...For example, a planner may find that his beautiful plans fail because he does not follow through on them. Like so many brilliant people, he believes that ideas move mountains. But bulldozers move mountains; ideas show where the bulldozers should go to work...
"Comparing your expectations with your results also indicates what not to do. We all have a vast number of areas in which we have no talent or skill and little chance of becoming even mediocre. In those areas a person...should not take on work, jobs, and assignments. One should waste as little effort as possible on improving areas of low competence. It takes far more energy and work to improve from incompetence to mediocrity than it takes to improve from first-rate performance to excellence. And yet most people--especially most
teachers and most organizations--concentrate on making incompetent performers into mediocre ones...

[Know how you perform and how you learn]

...A few common personality traits usually determine how a person performs...
[Am I a reader or a listener? Do I learn by writing, reading, doing, or talking? Do I work well with people or am I a loner? If I work well with people, in what relationship is that so? Am I better as a leader or a subordinate? "Do I produce results as a decision maker or as an advisor?... Do I perform well under stress or do I need a highly structured and predictable environment?" Do I work best in a big organization or a small one?] "The conclusion bears repeating: do not try to change yourself--you are unlikely to succeed. But work hard to improve the way you perform. And try not to take on work you cannot perform or will only perform poorly."

[Know your values]

[One aspect of values concerns ethics--the set of absolute rules for behavior in any situation. One can judge one's ethics by the "mirror test"--what kind of person do I want to see in the mirror in the morning? But there are other aspects of values that vary with an organization and with a situation. These need to match well enough between a person and that person's working environment. Examples include whether an organization works from the inside to fill personnel needs or always from the outside. Does a research-oriented company seek results by making constant, small improvements in product or by achieving occasional, highly expensive, and risky "breakthroughs"? Is the business focus on the short-term or the long-run?]...
"A person's strengths and the way that person performs rarely conflict; the two are complementary. But there is sometimes conflict between a person's values and his or her strengths. What one does well...might not fit with one's value system..."