In his book, *Hills, Skills, and Wills: How to Improve Yours (and Others) Performance*, Michael J. Ayulo identifies three categories of obstacles that hinder a person's performance. As the title suggests, he labels them as *hills*, *skills*, and *wills*. These are useful handles to put on some important distinctions.

If I go to the doctor with a serious illness, it's important that the doctor diagnose the cause of my illness correctly. Otherwise, the treatment he proposes may not work or might even make things worse. The same is true in diagnosing a performance problem. If I don't diagnose it correctly, my odds of solving it are pretty low. So let's take a glance at these three different diagnoses:

Three Types of Performance Obstacles

1. **Hills** are physical or environmental obstacles that stand in between us and our desired destination. So I have to find a way over, under, or around them or accept that I won't be able to solve this problem. For example, if I'm 4'11" tall, I need to accept that I'm not cut out to be the center on a professional basketball team. On the other hand, if I'm a stocky 6'11, my future as a jockey is seriously constrained.

   Money or time might be hills that prevent me from performing my best. Or as Ayulo points out, despite the merits of modern technology, it is a common source of the hills we often face these days. For example, the quality of my office internet connection has recently been an obstacle to my productivity. The internet dependent aspects of my productivity aren't going to improve unless I get the problem fixed, start working someplace with fast, reliable internet access, or find a way to eliminate my internet dependency.

2. **Skills** are the problem if I don't have the know-how or ability to do what's required. Even if I am 6'11" (I'm not!), I still have to learn how to play basketball if I'm going to become that pro center. Training and experience are solutions to most skill problems.

3. **Wills** are the issue when we don't want to do something. Even if I am 6'11" and have spent years honing my skills, my performance isn't going to be at its best unless I *want* to play basketball. If I don't have the *will* to do it, I may stumble through getting the job done but you won't get my best performance.

Apply the Right Solution to the Problem

If someone doesn't have the will to do something, I need to look for a way to motivate them. Preferably by recognizing and tapping into their personal values to provide intrinsic motivation. Training to increase their skill won't solve the problem unless the increased skill positively impacts their motivation.

But if they're motivated and trained, they still won't play good basketball if I give them a worn-out, under-inflated ball. But state-of-the-art tools and all the best resources won't solve the problem if they lack the know-how or the desire.

That's why solving performance problems must start with the correct diagnoses.

enLumen Leadership Services: illuminating your path to better leadership.