

Jack and Jill Went Up the Hill...Now What?

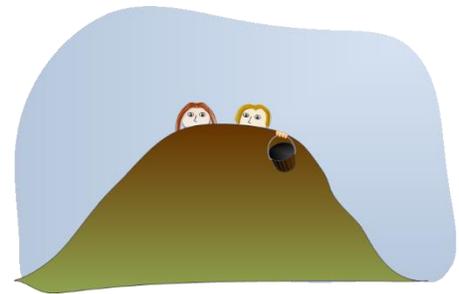
A Tale of Two Leaders

When Jack launched his homeless shelter he had no idea it would grow to house over a hundred people at a time and provide meals and showers for thousands more. He didn't expect to have a staff of eighteen people and numerous volunteers. But his passion for helping the homeless was contagious. He discovered he was good at raising support, launching creative programs, and recruiting people.

He knew he wasn't good at the administrative stuff, so he hired people or outsourced those functions. But now he had hit a plateau that he just couldn't get past. He seemed to have a revolving door of staff – about the time someone got to know the ropes enough to really make a contribution, they decided to move on. The people he hired were very skilled and shared his passion. His compensation and benefits were reasonably competitive, so why couldn't he keep strong players for more than a couple of years?

What Jack couldn't see was that the high caliber staff he hired needed to be growing themselves in order to be content. Jack was skilled at acquiring top talent, but he continued making every decision himself instead of delegating authority to that talented staff. Not only did the staff get bored, but the organization couldn't keep growing because Jack spent too much energy on lesser decisions that he didn't really need to make. He was limiting his staff's potential and limiting the growth of the organization at the same time.

Jill had a different story. As she sat at her desk comparing her numbers to industry averages, she was frustrated once again over why she couldn't keep her operational overhead in line with her peers. Orphan House had grown over twenty percent in the two years since she took over as Executive Director. But major donors were asking with increasing frequency why more of their money wasn't going into the program. Her stock answer about a season of investing for growth was starting to wear thin.



She knew she was carrying a larger staff than her peers, but everyone was so busy she just couldn't see where she could possibly cut.

Jill's blind spot was in mistaking busy-ness for productivity. Her continual growth strategies didn't factor in time to refine new processes after launch, so they continued to operate with the inefficiencies that are typical of processes put in place to meet project deadlines.

To make matters worse, each department tended to work independently, changing their own procedures without realizing how they impacted other parts of the organization. No one had the time to meet and discuss possible changes and improvements. They didn't recognize that even more time was consumed in the excessive churn of communications and activities generated by uncoordinated activities.

Jack and Jill are both good leaders. They achieved their current positions by being really good at certain things. But no one is really good at everything. Being a great leader requires recognizing your own strengths and building on them, even as you recognize your own weaknesses and find ways to compensate for them.

Some weaknesses are strengths that simply haven't been developed yet. The solution is to recognize them and develop them. Some weaknesses represent characteristics that just aren't in the DNA of the individual. None of us is wired to do it all. The solution in these cases is to find ways to compensate for the weaknesses to mitigate the risks that come with ignoring them.

No one has 20/20 vision when looking in the mirror. We can all benefit from someone on the outside looking in, validating our strategic choices, challenging our assumptions, pointing out blind spots, and bringing insight and illumination from a different vantage point.

enLumen Leadership Services is here to illuminate the unlit recesses of your leadership skills.