

“I WAS TOTALLY  
BLINDSIDED BY THESE  
RESULTS.”—FORMER  
BUSINESS OWNER



## Coaches Corner: Curing CEO Disease

**Y**ou have CEO disease. Yes, you do! As the leader of your business, it's unavoidable. CEO disease is the information vacuum around you that is created when people withhold important (frequently unpleasant) information from you. That's right. People aren't telling you everything! Either they're glossing over important details or shielding you from stuff you need to know. If you've ever been surprised by problems like sudden employee turnover or by a good client withholding payment, you've been stricken by CEO disease. Someone in your company knew the details but chose not to tell you. When you think about it, what you're missing is candid feedback. Now while you could ask yourself, "Why didn't they tell me?", I think it's more productive to simply accept that CEO disease is a reality for you and design your meeting framework to ensure openness and candor.

Yet as prevalent as CEO disease is regarding "business issues," it's nothing compared to the complete absence of candid feedback you get on your performance as a leader. Ever have someone tell you how uninspiring your last management

“GET THE FACTS  
BEFORE THE  
FACTS GET YOU.”

—PLAQUE ON OFFICE WALL  
OF P. JOHN ALDRED, FOUNDER,  
ENERFLEX SYSTEMS

team meeting was? I thought not. How about how poorly you delegated that last assignment? Researchers have found this lack of performance feedback is a huge impediment to leadership improvement. How can you become a better leader when you can't find out what you should get better at, or what you should stop doing? Your position as leader makes you the least likely person in the company to receive candid feedback; however, you—more than anyone else in your company—need this feedback.

Believe you already know what you have to work on and that you can do it yourself? Not so. According to the research, CEO disease is rarely cured through self-diagnosis. Detailed studies have found most leaders overrate their own leadership performance. Not surprising; we all have blind spots,

leaders included.

Another leadership false belief is that the effort to develop new leadership skills isn't worth it because one can't change. Simply not true. Leadership is a learned activity, so if you have the will, you can learn new skills. In fact, in my experience, a motivated leader can learn new skills very quickly.

So how do you cure CEO disease? Simply put, it's a process that starts by getting candid feedback from your colleagues, stakeholders, and direct reports. A well-conceived, 360-degree assessment that preserves the anonymity of the respondent is essential. Happily, we've found that employees love to be part of this process. Their feedback, together with an individualised action plan, will put you on the road to recovery from CEO disease. ◆

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