

Q If it's lonely at the top, how can I get support as I grow in my career?

A: Develop a "Hot Team" of people who advise, support and challenge.

BEFORE WRITING THIS COLUMN, I had just finished a coaching session with a newly promoted midlevel manager. Julie started our conversation with, "It's true, it is lonely at the top. With my promotion, I enjoy the opportunity to make a greater impact, but now my actions are scrutinized, former peers are now direct reports and I can't admit I don't have all the answers."

Leaders like Julie are often starved for someone to talk to, a person who can provide unbiased, safe and supportive feedback. Part of the issue is we expect leaders to be saviors and heroes. For them to ask for help or show vulnerability breaks the leadership myth. All of us, leaders and followers, need to boldly share our brilliance as well as our bruises, to engage in positive change, not wait for an invitation.

Executive coaches help, but leaders need ongoing support from people within their companies.

I advised Julie to create what I call Hot Team partnerships so she can draw on the experiences of others and receive positive mentoring from people who want her to win. These mentors will listen, ask probing questions, share in the successes as well as the setbacks and teach a new skill when needed.

By developing two-person Hot Team partnerships, Julie will increase her self-awareness, make better decisions and gain the support needed for a better work-life balance.

I told Julie her Hot Team partners should be from different departments and reporting structures to help ensure confidentiality.

"So, how does this work?" Julie asked.

"Suppose 'Susan,' an acquaintance of yours,

has a skill that you know you need in your role," I said. "Tell Susan specifically what your goals are and when you want them accomplished. Tell her you will phone her every week to report on your actions, and ask her not to accept any excuses for your temporary setbacks.

"Tell Susan what you want to be told if you're forced to admit that you've fallen off the horse. What should she say to get you back in the saddle? Sometimes a simple reminder of why your goals are so important is all that is required.

"Try to line up one Hot Team partner for each of your skills or attributes that you feel you need to improve. You, in turn, may be a Hot Team partner for someone else because of a skill you have."

As Julie and I were wrapping up our session, I suggested she let other leaders know that she is available to be on their Hot Teams.

It's a great way to contribute to others' success, and it could be an excellent opportunity to network within your organization.

As Julie walked away, she turned and said, "OK, I'll give it a try. And maybe leadership won't be so lonely." ■

To learn how to set up a Hot Team mentoring program in your company, join the free webinar from noon to 1 p.m. July 16. Sign up at www.missionfacilitators.com.



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