



How advisory boards help leaders improve their business: “People can only persuade themselves by talking with others”

In this quote by Filip Fiers, corporate and team coach, suggests that handling the challenges of leading a successful business does not have to be a lonely journey.

Advisory boards have shown to be a great help for leaders and entrepreneurs to overcome the challenges of growing a successful business. With their diversity in expert opinion, skills, knowledge and guidance, advisory boards can provide companies with non-binding strategic advice and insight. They can help an organisation test its strategic thinking and open doors to certain expertise that may not have been available otherwise (Advisory Board Centre, 2020).

In short, a collaboration between the leadership and an advisory board is an invaluable asset to any organisation.

This article has gathered the practical advice of various experts in this matter: Marshall Goldsmith, Peter Robertson, VOKA (Chamber of Commerce East Flanders) and Filip Fiers.

Start an open conversation and get rid of self-limiting beliefs...

According to Marshall Goldsmith, executive leadership coach and author, having a support group or advisory board “is more important today than ever” to any person who does not want to feel alone in their position.

Having a group of people you can count on, provides a sense of community and a sense of purpose. This allows many leaders to take pride in the process while still keeping focus on the result. With the right support, advice and help, advisory boards can make a real difference while doing day to day business. As Goldsmith emphasises: “It used to get lonely at the top...” (Goldsmith & The Knowledge Project, z.d.) but it certainly does not have to be so anymore.



Once the conversation is open, continue by getting rid of your self-limiting beliefs. Summarised, this is the advice of the renowned executive coach and bestselling author Marshall Goldsmith to all leaders who want to increase their effectiveness (Goldsmith & The Knowledge Project, z.d.).

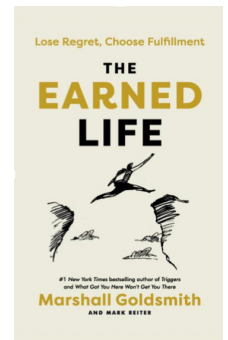
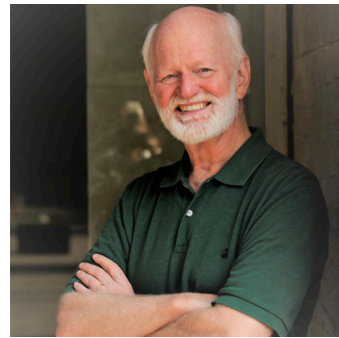
As a leader, the first step you should be taking is identifying your self-limiting beliefs; what do you think you are not able to do?

Self-limiting beliefs and believing the myth of innate talent inhibits the odds of getting better, and learning something new. Why? Because learning something new always involves feeling uncomfortable with the new thing you are learning to do; at the beginning it feels like pretending. For example, if a person firmly believes that she is not a good listener, whenever she starts to learn to become a more active listener or somebody tells her she is, indeed, a good listener, the person might not believe it. Why? Because of her fixed beliefs. As a consequence, the person inhibits her learning. Changing our behaviours include feeling a bit uncomfortable at the beginning and requires the perseverance to feel authentic about them.

A skilled and cognitively diverse advisory board is the key to getting the right support

Diversity knows many forms: diversity in expertise, gender, age, culture and many more. In his book, [Always Change a Winning Team](#), [Dr. Peter Robertson](#) (2005) addresses the kind of diversity that is relevant for the changeability and growth of an organisation. Robertson has done thorough [research](#) while developing a framework and set of instruments that measure the aspects in people and teams' cognition and behaviour that enable an organisation to change and grow.

"People have different ways of perceiving and handling everyday life; they might search for stability or trends and innovation, and feel more attracted to situations in which theories, technology and concepts are the focus, while others invest more energy in people-related aspects, developing relationships, understanding needs, and so on". These are all aspects that make people different from one another.



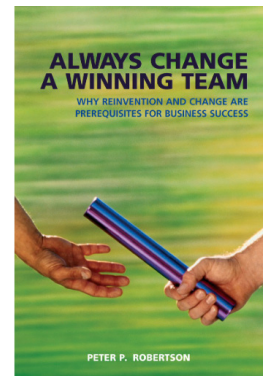
Marshall Goldsmith has recently published a new book called [The Earned Life](#); an approach that accommodates both our persistent need for achievement and the inescapable "stuff happens" unfairness of life. You can also listen to the [The Knowledge Project podcast](#) in which [Shane Parrish](#) interviews [Marshall Goldsmith](#).

In his research, Robertson (2005) found these aspects are the most relevant when connecting people to strategy and its execution. They are called Cognitive Diversity and they can be measured by the AEM-Cube, developed by Robertson.



Having an advisory board that is cognitively diverse helps leaders make better decisions. In an organisation, many different growth processes take place in parallel: the development of products and services, the way departments are run, or personal careers. Organisation leaders should act analytically towards each process and take into account cognitive diversity because it allows them to recognise individual and team differences and understand their impact in growth.

Organisations that are successfully able to cope with change while they continue growing have a mix of people, of cognitively diverse people, working in teams at all levels within the organisational hierarchy. Being aware of cognitive diversity promotes appreciation of these differences, while knowing how to successfully operationalise them.



Peter Robertson focuses on decision-maker dynamics in business transformations. He has over 30 years of experience as an international business consultant with KPMG (Amsterdam), Human Insight (London/The Netherlands), and as an associate professor at several universities in the Netherlands, China and the US. He is the author of *Always Change a Winning Team*, which describes the development and history of the organisational ecological approach.

How to establish a valuable and diverse advisory board that optimally helps an organisation?

Having tackled the importance of having a cognitively diverse advisory board or support group, this article aims to shed some light on how this can be accomplished.

A recent example comes from one of Human Insight's business partners, Filip Fiers and [VOKA](#) (Chamber of Commerce East Flanders). Anke Cosijns, coordinator of the program that helps company leaders form an effective advisory board at VOKA explains how the program takes place.

Within the framework of a program developed by VOKA business leaders first discuss the organisational goals and strategy with a programme mentor. Together they identify how an advisory board fits into their strategy. Then, the program continues with a training in which the leader learns how to set up a successful advisory board. Each participant maps the importance of experience, expertise and cognitive diversity. The AEM-Cube is used as a mapping and common language tool.

Once the board is assembled, the participants learn how to promote open communication within the advisory; "making sure the different perspectives and expertise of the board members is heard and taken into account while making decisions that affect strategy execution is crucial" explains Filip Fiers.



Filip knows the impact of open, trustful conversations when a team is cognitively diverse and has the right combination of expertise. In his years of experience as a coach, he has seen how people can only persuade themselves by speaking with peers. That is why he suggests that leaders should reach out to and work with advisory boards that can successfully make long lasting change.



Filip Fiers is a Professional Certified Coach (ICF) and a Human Insight Business Partner. He focuses on individual and team development within a business context. His main goal is to make managers, and their teams collaborate and perform better in a fast moving, constantly changing environment. He is associate at the faculty of the Academy of Executive Coaching (UK). For the last 10 years, Filip has been coaching clients across all levels of seniority in a variety of industries, including professional services, FMCG, banking, energy distribution and industrial manufacturing.

Voka aims to help around 20 companies each year to form their advisory or directory board. The results have been very satisfactory and the companies have grown significantly. VOKA has helped small and big organisations in many different sectors, including the industrial, constructional, medical, IT and music industry and companies with 5 to 150 employees. The VOKA program is coordinated by Anke Cosijns.



Anke Cosijns works at VOKA as advisor of SMO's and programme coordinator. Since early 2021, she has been responsible for putting together advisory and management boards for SMEs. In addition to substantive guidance, she provides qualitative matchmaking between SMEs and external advisers or directors.

Literature

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