FACTOR VI: PERSONAL AND INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

CLUSTER S: BEING OPEN AND RECEPTIVE

11 Composure

That is the happiest conversation where there is no competition, no vanity, but a calm, quiet interchange of sentiments. Samuel Johnson – 18th century English writer

Section 1: Your Development Need(s)

Unskilled

☐ Gets rattled and loses cool under pressure and stress
☐ May blow up, say things he/she shouldn’t
☐ Gets easily overwhelmed and becomes emotional, defensive or withdrawn
☐ May be defensive and sensitive to criticism
☐ May be cynical or moody
☐ May be knocked off balance by surprises and get easily rattled
☐ May contribute to others losing composure or being unsettled
☐ May let anger, frustration and anxiety show

Select one to three of the competencies listed below to use as a substitute for this competency if you decide not to work on it directly.

Substitutes: 2,3,8,12,26,33,37,41,43,44,48,57

Skilled

☐ Is cool under pressure
☐ Does not become defensive or irritated when times are tough
☐ Is considered mature
☐ Can be counted on to hold things together during tough times
☐ Can handle stress
☐ Is not knocked off balance by the unexpected
☐ Doesn’t show frustration when resisted or blocked
☐ Is a settling influence in a crisis

Overused Skill

☐ May not show appropriate emotion
☐ May be seen as cold and uncaring
☐ May seem flat in situations where others show feelings
☐ May be easily misinterpreted
☐ May not be able to relate well to those whose actions and decisions are based more on feelings than on thinking
Select one to three of the competencies listed below to work on to compensate for an overuse of this skill.

Compensators: 3, 10, 14, 26, 27, 31, 44, 60, 66

Some Causes
- Defensive
- Easily overwhelmed; very emotional
- Lack self-confidence
- Perfectionist
- Sensitive
- Too much going on
- Very control oriented
- Weak impulse control

Leadership Architect® Factors and Clusters
This competency is in the Personal and Interpersonal Skills Factor (VI). This competency is in the Being Open and Receptive Cluster (S) with: 26, 33, 41, 44. You may want to check other competencies in the same Factor/Cluster for related tips.

The Map
First about emotions. Emotions are electricity and chemistry. Emotions are designed to help you cope with emergencies and threats. Emotions trigger predictable body changes. Heart pumps faster and with greater pressure. Blood flows faster. Glucose is released into the bloodstream for increased energy and strength. Eyes dilate to take in more light. Breathing rate increases to get more oxygen. Why is that? To either fight or flee from saber-toothed tigers, of course. Emotions are designed to help us with the so-called fight or flight response. It makes the body faster and stronger temporarily. The price? In order to increase energy to the muscles, the emotional response decreases resources for the stomach (that’s why we get upset stomachs under stress) and the thinking brain (that’s why we say and do dumb things under stress). Even though we might be able to lift a heavy object off a trapped person, we can’t think of the right thing to say in a tense meeting. Once the emotional response is triggered, it has to run its course. If no threat follows the initial trigger, it lasts from 45-60 seconds in most people. That’s why your grandmother told you to count to 10. Trouble is, people have saber-toothed tigers in their heads. In modern times, thoughts can trigger this emotional response. Events which are certainly not physically threatening, like being criticized, can trigger the response. Even worse, today people have added a third “f” to the fight or flight response—freeze. Emotions can shut you down and leave you speechless, neither choosing to fight (argue, respond) or flee (calmly shut down the transaction and exit). You’ll have to fight these reactions to learn to be cool under pressure.
Section 2: Learning on Your Own

These self-development remedies will help you build your skill(s).

Some Remedies

☐ 1. Do you know what sets you off? Identify your trigger points. Write down the last 25 times you lost your composure. Most people who have composure problems have three to five repeating triggers. Criticism. Loss of control. A certain kind of person. An enemy. Being surprised. Spouse. Children. Money. Authority. Angry at yourself because you can’t say no? Try to group 90% of the events into three to five categories. Once you have the groupings, ask yourself why these are a problem. Is it ego? Losing face? Being caught short? Being found out? Causing you more work? In each grouping, what would be a more mature response? Mentally and physically rehearse a better response. Try to decrease by 10% a month the number of times you lose your composure.

☐ 2. No filter? Increase your impulse control. People say and do inappropriate things when they lose their composure. The problem is that they say or do the first thing that occurs to them. Research shows that generally somewhere between the second and third thing you think of to say or do is the best option. Practice holding back your first response long enough to think of a second. When you can do that, wait long enough to think of a third before you choose. By that time 50% of your composure problems should go away.

☐ 3. Need to regain composure? Count to 10. Our thinking and judgment are not at their best during the emotional response. Create and practice delaying tactics. Go get a pencil out of your briefcase. Go get a cup of coffee. Ask a question and listen. Go up to the flip chart and write something. Take notes. See yourself in a setting you find calming. Go to the bathroom. You need about a minute to regain your composure after the emotional response is triggered. Don’t do or say anything until the minute has passed.

☐ 4. Impatient? Delay gratification. Are you impatient? Do you get upset when the plane is delayed? The food is late? The car isn’t ready? Your spouse is behind schedule? For most of us, life is one big delay. We always seem to be waiting for someone else to do something so we can do our something. People with composure problems often can’t accept delay of what they want, and think they deserve and have coming. When what they want is delayed, they get belligerent and demanding. Write down the last 25 delays that set you off. Group them into three to five categories. Create and rehearse a more mature response. Relax. Reward yourself with something enjoyable. Adopt a philosophical stance since there’s little or nothing you can do about it. Think great thoughts while you’re waiting. Force a smile or find something to laugh about. More help? – See #41 Patience.
5. Defensive? Deal constructively with criticism. A lot of loss of composure starts with an intended or even an unintended criticism. There are a lot of perfect people in this world who cannot deal with a piece of negative information about themselves or about something they have or have not done. The rest of us have flaws that most around us know about and once in a while tell us about. We even know that once in a while unjust criticism is sent our way. Dealing constructively with criticism is a learnable skill. Learn to be an observer of defensiveness and anger around you. Many people with these problems have many shoulds, musts, and commandments about the behavior of others. More help? – See #108 Defensiveness.

6. Too controlling? Loosen your grip. Are you somewhat of a perfectionist? Need to have everything just so? Create plans and expect them to be followed? Very jealous of your time? Another source of loss of composure is when things do not go exactly as planned. Put slack in your plans. Expect the unexpected. Lengthen the time line. Plan for delays. List worst-case scenarios. Most of the time you will be pleasantly surprised and the rest of the time you won’t get so upset.

7. Feel a need to retaliate? Don’t make it personal. Do you feel a need to punish the people and groups that set you off? Do you become hostile, angry, sarcastic or vengeful? While all that may be temporarily satisfying to you, they will all backfire and you will lose in the long term. When someone attacks you, rephrase it as an attack on a problem. Reverse the argument—ask what they would do if they were in your shoes. When the other side takes a rigid position, don’t reject it. Ask why—what are the principles behind the offer, how do we know it’s fair, what’s the theory of the case. Play out what would happen if their position was accepted. Let the other side vent frustration, blow off steam, but don’t react.

8. Losing perspective? Be objective. When you do reply to an attack, keep it to the facts and their impact on you. It’s fine for you to draw conclusions about the impact on yourself (“I felt blindsided.”). It’s not fine for you to tell others their motives (“You blindsided me” means you did it, probably meant to, and I know the meaning of your behavior). So state the meaning for yourself; ask others what their actions meant.


tempers hold it in too much, the pressure builds, and the teakettle blows. The body stores energy. It has to go somewhere. Work on releasing your work frustration off-work.

11. Letting it build up? Monitor your internal pressure gauge. Maybe your fuse is too long. You may wait and wait, let the pressure build, keep your concerns to yourself, then explode as a pressure release. Write down what you’re concerned about, then talk about the issues with confidantes and coworkers before you blow up. If the pressure interferes with your thought processes at work (you’re supposed to be listening, but you’re fretting instead), pick a time to worry. Say to yourself, “I'll write this down, then think about it on the way home.” Train yourself to stay in the present.

Section 3: Learning from Feedback

These sources would give you the most accurate and detailed feedback on your skill(s).

1. Development Professionals
Sometimes it might be valuable to get some analysis and feedback from a professional trained and certified in the area you’re working on—possibly a career counselor, a therapist, clergy, a psychologist, etc.

2. Direct Reports
Across a variety of settings, your direct reports probably see you the most. They are the recipients of most of your managerial behaviors. They know your work. They can compare you with former bosses. Since they may hesitate to give you negative feedback, you have to set the atmosphere to make it easier for them. You have to ask.

3. Human Resource Professionals
Human Resource professionals have both a formal and informal feedback role. Since they have access to unique and confidential information, they can provide the right context for feedback you’ve received. Sometimes they may be “directed” to give you feedback. Other times, they may pass on feedback just to be helpful to you.

4. Peers and Colleagues
Peers and colleagues have a special social and working relationship. They attend staff meetings together, share private views, get feedback from the same boss, travel together, and are knowledgeable about each other’s work. You perhaps let your guard down more around peers and act more like yourself. They can be a valuable source of feedback.
Section 4: Learning from Develop-in-Place Assignments

These part-time develop-in-place assignments will help you build your skill(s).

- Study humor in business settings; read books on the nature of humor; collect cartoons you could use in presentations; study funny people around you; keep a log of funny jokes and sayings you hear; read famous speeches and study how humor was used; attend comedy clubs; ask a funny person to act as your tutor; practice funny lines and jokes with others.
- Manage a group of resistant people with low morale through an unpopular change or project.
- Manage a group of people where you are a towering expert and the people in the group are not.
- Handle a tough negotiation with an internal or external client or customer.
- Help shut down a plant, regional office, product line, business, operation, etc.
- Prepare and present a proposal of some consequence to top management.
- Manage a dissatisfied internal or external customer; troubleshoot a performance or quality problem with a product or service.
- Manage a cost-cutting project.
- Take on a task you dislike or hate to do.
- Make peace with an enemy or someone you’ve disappointed with a product or service or someone you’ve had some trouble with or don’t get along with very well.

Section 5: Learning from Full-Time Jobs

These full-time jobs offer the opportunity to build your skill(s).

- 1. Crisis Manager

The core demands to qualify as Crisis Manager are: (1) Leader responsible for an unpredictable, unique crisis of significant proportion. (2) Success and failure will be evident and visible. (3) Takes Herculean effort to solve. (4) Learning something on the fly. (5) Solution requires cross-boundary team. (6) Leader will be a spokesperson and potentially subjected to media scrutiny. (7) Hostile questioning and suspicious atmosphere is common. (8) Time pressure is extreme. (9) Solution involves working with parties outside the organization. (10) Usually short-term (up to three months). (11) Other parts of job would have to be temporarily set aside. Examples of crisis management would be: (1) A product safety recall; product or system failure. (2) Unexpected death of a CEO or senior corporate executive. (3) Unexpected termination or scandal involving a CEO or senior corporate executive. (4) Trouble with a key customer or supplier that decreases revenue or production. (5) Natural disasters. (6) Terrorist attacks. (7) Kidnapping or arrest of employees; violent crime against employees.
2. Line to Staff Switches

The core demands to qualify as a Line to Staff switch are: (1) Intellectually/strategically demanding. (2) Highly visible to others. (3) New area/perspective/method/culture/function. (4) Moving away from a bottom line. (5) Moving from field to headquarters. (6) Exposure to high-level executives. Examples: (1) Business/strategic planning. (2) Heading a staff department. (3) Assistant to/chief of staff to a senior executive. (4) Head of a task force. (5) Human resources role.

3. Staff Leadership (Influencing Without Authority)

The core demands to qualify as Staff Leadership are: (1) Significant challenge (e.g., start-up, fix-it, scope and/or scale assignment, strategic planning project, changes in management practices/systems). (2) Insufficient direct authority to make it happen. (3) Tight deadlines. (4) Visible to significant others. (5) Sensitive politics. Examples of Staff Leadership (Influencing Without Authority) jobs would be: (1) Leading a support function without P&L responsibilities. (2) Managing an internal consulting function for the organization (e.g., OD or HR consultant). (3) Project manager of a cross-functional or cross-departmental initiative. (4) Managing a cross-functional, matrixed team.

4. Start-Ups

The core demands to qualify as a start from scratch are: (1) Starting something new for you and/or for the organization. (2) Forging a new team. (3) Creating new systems/facilities/staffs/programs/procedures. (4) Contextual adversity (e.g., uncertainty, government regulation, unions, difficult environment). Seven types of start from scratch: (1) Planning, building, hiring, and managing (e.g., building a new facility, opening up a new location, moving a unit or company). (2) Heading something new (e.g., new product, new service, new line of business, new department/function, major new program). (3) Taking over a group/product/service/program that had existed for less than a year and was off to a fast start. (4) Establishing overseas operations. (5) Implementing major new designs for existing systems. (6) Moving a successful program from one unit to another. (7) Installing a new organization-wide process as a full-time job like Total Work Systems (e.g., TQM/ISO/Six Sigma).

Section 6: Learning from Your Plan

These additional remedies will help make this development plan more effective for you.

Learning to Learn Better

1. Rehearse Successful Tactics/Strategies/Actions

Mentally rehearse how you will act before going into the situation. Try to anticipate how others will react, what they will say, and how you’ll respond. Check out the best and worst cases; play out both scenes. Check your feelings in conflict or worst-case situations; rehearse staying under control.
2. Put Yourself in Situations That Call for Your Weaknesses
Put yourself in situations where you must overcome or neutralize a weakness to be successful. Find opportunities to develop countercoping skills: If you’re shy, attend functions where you don’t know many people; if you’re too aggressive, work with children, etc.

3. Examine Why You’re Blocked on a Key Issue
Examine what you are worrying/angry about and list all of your thoughts about it; ask why these feelings are holding you back. Why are the feelings overriding your thinking? How are they getting in the way? Why are they important to you? How can you move beyond them and learn to do something differently?

4. Study Your History of Conflicts for Insights
List the people and situations which cause you trouble. What are the common themes? Why do those kinds of people and/or those kinds of situations set you off? Do they have to? Was the conflict really important? Did it help or block your learning and getting things done? Try to anticipate those people/situations in the future.

5. Learn to Separate Opinions from Facts
Practice separating opinions, beliefs, feelings, attitudes, and values from facts and data. Try to base more of your comments and actions on the data side. If there is a need to air subjective information, announce it as such, and label it for what it is. Don’t present opinions with the look and sound of data.

Learning from Experience, Feedback, and Other People

6. Feedback in Unusual Contexts/Situations
Temporary and extreme conditions and contexts may shade interpretations of your behavior and intentions. Demands of the job may drive you outside your normal mode of operating. Hence, feedback you receive may be inaccurate during those times. However, unusual contexts affect our behavior less than most assume. It’s usually a weak excuse.

7. Learning from Bad Bosses
First, what does he/she do so well to make him/her your boss? (Even bad bosses have strengths.) Then, ask what makes this boss bad for you. Is it his/her behavior? Attitude? Values? Philosophy? Practices? Style? What is the source of the conflict? Why do you react as you do? Do others react the same? How are you part of the problem? What do you do that triggers your boss? If you wanted to, could you reduce the conflict or make it go away by changing something you do? Is there someone around you who doesn’t react like you? How are they different? What can you learn from them? What is your emotional reaction to this boss? Why do you react like that? What can you do to cope with these feelings? Can you avoid
reacting out of anger and frustration? Can you find something positive about the situation? Can you use someone else as a buffer? Can you learn from your emotions? What lasting lessons of managing others can you take away from this experience? What won’t you do as a manager? What will you do differently? How could you teach these principles you’ve learned to others by the use of this example?

☐ 8. Learning from Bad Situations
All of us will find ourselves in bad situations from time to time. Good intentions gone bad. Impossible tasks and goals. Hopeless projects. Even though you probably can’t perform well, the key is to at least take away some lessons and insights. How did things get to be this way? What factors led to the impasse? How can you make the best of a bad situation? How can you neutralize the negative elements? How can you get the most out of yourself and your staff under the chilling situation? What can you salvage? How can you use coping strategies to minimize the negatives? How can you avoid these situations going forward? In bad situations: (1) Be resourceful. Get the most you can out of the situation. (2) Try to deduce why things got to be that way. (3) Learn from both the situation you inherited and how you react to it. (4) Integrate what you learn into your future behavior.

☐ 9. Learning from Mistakes
Since we’re human, we all make mistakes. The key is to focus on why you made the mistake. Spend more time locating causes and less worrying about the effects. Check how you react to mistakes. How much time do you spend being angry with yourself? Do you waste time stewing or do you move on? More importantly, do you learn? Ask why you made the mistake. Are you likely to repeat it under similar situations? Was it a lack of skill? Judgment? Style? Not enough data? Reading people? Misreading the challenge? Misreading the politics? Or was it just random? A good strategy that just didn’t work? Others who let you down? The key is to avoid two common reactions to your mistakes: (1) avoiding similar situations instead of learning and trying again, and (2) trying to repeat what you did, only more diligently and harder, hoping to break through the problem, yet making the same mistake again and with greater impact. Neither trap leaves us with better strategies for the future. Neither is a learning strategy. To learn to do something differently, focus on the patterns in your behavior that get you in trouble and go back to first causes, those that tell you something about your shortcomings. Facing ourselves squarely is always the best way to learn.

Learning from Courses
☐ 10. Insight Events
These are courses designed around assessing skills and providing feedback to the participants. These events can be a powerful source of self-knowledge and can lead to significant development if done right.

When selecting a self-insight course, consider the following: (1) Are the skills assessed the important
ones? (2) Are the assessment techniques and instruments sound? (3) Are those who are providing the feedback trained and professional? (4) Is the feedback provided in a user-friendly and “actionable” format? (5) Does the feedback include development planning? (6) Is the setting comfortable and conducive to reflection and learning? (7) Are the other participants the kinds of people you could learn from? (8) Are you in the right frame of mind to learn from this kind of intense experience? Select events on the basis of positive answers to these eight questions.

_Every great player has learned the two Cs: How to concentrate and how to maintain composure._ Byron Nelson – American golfing legend
Suggested Readings


