

# THE ULTRA PROFESSIONAL Vs THE TEAM



You have just put the telephone down. You have just returned from a meeting. You have just had a visitation. You are angry, upset and frustrated. Why? Because you have just had another encounter with an ultra professional! Not just one of your exceptionally good people, of which you may have many, but that particularly egocentric individual who could be described as an ultra professional for very different reasons.

This particular breed of ultra professional is alive and well. You probably have at least one of them in your team. They cause you pain, heartache, grief and sleepless nights. They are difficult to manage, never satisfied, highly critical of you and quite capable of threatening your own well-being and self-confidence as a manager. Worst of all, they constitute a constant threat to the well-being of your team.

The issue for all of us as managers is to what extent do we pander to the needs of the ultra professional as we try to build effective and high performing teams on whom our success is ultimately dependent?

Let's start by establishing the characteristics of the ultra professional. There are six main attributes which identify them.

## SELF-CENTRED AND STRONG-WILLED

Ultra professionals are out for themselves. Make no mistake about it, while they may appear to be team players, their prime motivators are status, material rewards and power. They would never admit to it but self-enhancement and self-advancement are their core values. Charming on the face of it, they are strong-willed, unforgiving, and determined to get their own way. You are dealing with people whose inner-beings, essentially cold and calculating, are masked by their charm and confidence.

## HIGHER OPINIONS OF THEMSELVES AND HIGHER ASPIRATIONS THAN CAN BE ACCOMMODATED

Ultra professionals aim high. Their self-imposed motivation is to outshine everyone else. They start from a standpoint of 'I'm better than the rest, my views should therefore prevail'. There is no humility, little understanding of the views or feelings of others, little consideration of what is best for the team. Quite the contrary. Time, energy and resources are constantly manipulated to satisfy their own agendas.

Ultra professionals believe themselves to be better not only than their peers but also their manager! Their insatiable appetite for promotion, reward and high profile responsibilities constitute aspirations that organisations frequently cannot, and almost certainly should not, seek to accommodate.

## NOT GOOD AT MANAGING OTHERS- ULTRA PROFESSIONALS ARE NOT GOOD MANAGERS OF PEOPLE

Instinctively autocratic, they are frequently indifferent to the needs of others and choose to believe that they can always do the job better than anyone else.

Their highly-tuned antennae are constantly alert to the need to defend this self-image. As a result, their natural style is to value

loyalty over effectiveness in those who report to them and their delegation skills are rarely employed beyond parcelling out the tedious, the unimportant or the unavoidable support activities.

Encouraging growth and development in others is not on their agenda. Those who are not allies represent a threat and their motives, abilities, style and decisions are constantly monitored and criticised.

The ultra professional's credo can be summarised as 'if I snuff out your candle, mine will appear brighter!'

## INTOLERANCE AND CRITICISM OF OTHERS

Ultra professionals are intolerant. Intolerant of mistakes, intolerant of anything that isn't absolutely clear, intolerant of systems, intolerant of people and their opinions. Intolerant in short, of **anything** that fails to meet their precise professional requirements and intolerant of **everything** that fails to enhance their ability to deliver.

Dealing with ultra professionals is akin to dealing with the insatiable desire of a child for more possessions. Because they are constantly dissatisfied they have a perpetual need to win. And when things don't go their way it is never their fault and they throw tantrums, broadcasting their disenchantment with you, to others and the whole organisation!

## PERFECTIONISM AND MOODINESS

Ultra professionals are perfectionists at heart. They tend to see things as black or white, right or wrong, good or bad, working for them or against them. Obsessiveness characterises their view of the world. Things are not just wrong, they are terribly wrong. Things are not just going well for them, they are terrific! Everyone in the team knows when they are down, the whole world knows when they're on an up.

Unbalanced in their perspective, they unbalance others. And their impact extends far beyond their immediate colleagues. Leading a team is never an easy task but leading one whose morale can skyrocket or plummet according to the prevailing mood of the resident ultra professional is nigh on impossible!

## HIGH TASK CONCERN AND LITTLE PEOPLE CONCERN

Ultra professionals are essentially task driven. They like to get results, do deals, complete transactions, achieve material or numeric success. If they are frustrated in this their energies become internally directed into politics, manipulating people and trying to influence decisions to get a result that best suits them. In all of this it is the result itself, not the people involved in getting it that matters most to them.

This, then, is the conundrum, for while ultra professionals do not make good people managers, they can be wonderful lead performers who with the right resources and back-up can achieve the most extraordinary results. But this requires the support of the very team that they seek to ignore, divide and diminish. Here lies the tension and challenge for all of us as managers. How do we square the circle?

**Just as there are six hall-marks of the ultra professional there are six ways to manage them as part of a team.**



## RELEASE AND HARNESS

The key to managing ultra professionals is to release their talents but harness their contribution to the team. While they may feel that they do more than anybody else, are more capable than anybody else and make a greater contribution than anybody else, the truth is that they could not deliver without the organisation which employs them and the team of people around them.

Their attitudes, insights, knowledge, skills, and behaviour need to be harnessed and driven by what is best for the team.

Ultra professionals are like thorough-bred race-horses being required to become one of a team of six horses drawing a carriage, of which the other five have valuable but different talents. The issue is one of accommodation and acceptance by both parties. No accommodation and there can be no releasing and harnessing of the talent and therefore no going forward together.

## INCREASE THE CHALLENGE AND THE DEPENDENCY ON OTHERS

Ultra professionals tend to believe that they are indispensable and that they can achieve without the help of others. They constantly need to be stretched and to understand their dependency on others. There is only one way for them to recognise this and that is to increase the challenge in their jobs in such a way that they are increasingly reliant on fellow team members.

They need to understand that unless they are supported by the skills of others they cannot succeed. The issue is one of mutual respect.

## INCREASE THE REWARDS BUT NOT THE POWER

To keep ultra professionals motivated you need to satisfy their motivational agenda. More money, more recognition, more status are all important motivators for them. But increase their power and influence over the team or within your organisation at your peril. It will not be long before you witness splits, sub-groups and lobbying of an intensity that you had never previously experienced!

Power is the life-blood of ultra professionals. It is also their undoing because, unused to handling it wisely, and incapable of seeing anyone's views but their own, they corrupt it, employ it to their own advantage and to the detriment of the team. Their ability to influence must be controlled by you and the team. The issue is who makes the decisions. Teams are built on strong leadership with genuine integrity and participation in decision-making. These values must be protected at all costs.

## KEEP OUTWARDLY FOCUSED

Ultra professionals let loose on internal issues devote their energies to fault-finding, endless debate on matters which are not their responsibility and countless discussions on structural and decision-making issues. If ultra professionals are not outwardly focused on achieving greater success for the organisation their energies can create havoc.

Competitor information and results, league tables, market share surveys and ratings can be used to have ultra professionals do what

they do best-compet! Direct their efforts constantly into the marketplace against competitors, and give them the best resources possible to achieve success, and you will derive most of the benefits and few of the risks of employing them. Use their talents externally versus internally.

## USE AS MENTORS NOT MANAGERS

The one thing that ultra professionals can bring to the team is expertise. Provide every possible forum for them to share their knowledge, insights and skills with team members. Their job is to share everything they can to make the team successful. Build that into their accountabilities and make sure it happens.

Their job is to make others as knowledgeable and competent as them, not to ensure their own employability versus others. Do not let ultra professionals manage, they are usually disastrous managers for all the reasons previously given. If they have to be managers to give them the required status, keep them focused, manage them strongly and make sure they have good management skills in their teams to support them.

## CREATE WIN/WINS

You will only achieve success with ultra professionals if you can manage to create win/wins with them. They are usually highly regarded by your customers, they are probably well-known in the market place, and it is likely they are held in high esteem by your seniors.

You will only keep them by managing their dependence on you (and by providing personal wins for them), in return for delivering a performance that is to your satisfaction. Understand their needs and work to meet these consistently, but insist on getting what you want in return otherwise you will not earn their respect and they will take you for all they can get!

The ultra professional versus the team. If you had to choose a winner which would it be? Teams need that rare talent for genius that so often only ultra professionals can bring. Ultra professionals need the team and the organisation to exist (otherwise they would be running their own businesses). There is the potential here for destruction or enormous success.

What is the answer? The answer is simple but never easy. Kept in their place, ultra professionals are an incredible corporate asset. If allowed unbridled freedom, they are a real corporate liability. In the years ahead, organisations will become increasingly reluctant to indulge the unreasonable demands of ultra professionals for teamwork is perceived to be key to corporate survival. Yet real corporate success may be reserved for those who can successfully manage the ultra professional as part of that team.

Who is to train and harness the ultra professionals into this new way of working? It has to be you. If not, you will struggle to achieve success as a manager, and you may well become another victim of the ultra professional's struggle against the team, a struggle which is likely to go on forever. Are you up to it?