Preventing Executive/Manager Derailment:
Career Derailment Prevention Check List

"Tips from the Crypt "– An Executive Summary for Executives, Managers, Professionals and Board Members

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Research on executive effectiveness has found that **33 % of executives** selected for senior positions **fail** [1]. Some estimates run as high as 50% [2]. How do you know if a key employee is headed for a crash? With the cost of replacing key employees reaching into the hundreds of thousands of dollars preventing derailment is critical [3]. Drawing from several sources (executive leadership literature review, my professional experience as an executive coach, interviews with recruiters, etc.,) clear indicators and patterns emerge that point toward careers headed for derailment. One startling fact emerges: there are amazing similarities between the careers of successful individuals and derailers so it's often hard to see a derailment coming before it's too late.

Below is a list of similarities, differences and the **key derailment indicators and patterns** to look out for regardless of industry or stage of company growth. If any of the derailment indicators are emerging then watch out! It's time to take corrective developmental action before a potentially successful career goes South.

Similarities between the careers of individuals on track for success vs. derailment [4]:

- Incredibly bright
- Outstanding track records
- Identified early as a high potential employees
- Personable (not perfect)
- Ambitious
- Made significant sacrifices for the organization
- Moved up during reorganization or merger
- Excellent at motivating or directing subordinates

Difference show up however in the following areas:

- Track record
- Interpersonal style
- Composure
- Handling of mistakes
- Solving Problems

Reasons for derailment – major factors [5]:

- Decline in business performance

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[1] Melvin Sorcher, Ph.D., Predicting Executive Success
[2] Randall P. White, Ph.D., & David L. DeVries, Ph.D., Making the Wrong Choice: Failure in the Selection of Senior-level Managers
[3] Costs due to the cascading effect of recruitment expense, lost time, loss of knowledge/intellectual property, loss of other employees who leave with or because of the exec., etc. source: TRW Corporation
[4] John Ramos, Why Executives Derail
[5] McCall & Lombardo, What Makes a Top Executive

- Insensitive, abrasive, intimidating style
- Poor criticism tolerance
- Poor frustration tolerance
- Cold, aloof, arrogant
- Betrayed trust
- Over managing – failing to delegate, build team
- Overly ambitious
- Poor staffing ability
- Unable to think strategically
- Unable to adapt to boss, culture of company
- Conflict adverse
- Poor interpersonal communication
- Overly dependent on others to advocate for them
- Specific skill deficiencies

How these flaws are usually discovered – a few examples:

- Loss of a boss who covered the weakness
- Inept handling of a performance problem of a subordinate
- Clash with boss or other employees
- Trail of little problems that reach a critical mass
- Trail of bruised people
- Strengths became weaknesses – did not adapt to changing business conditions
- Success went to his/her head and became arrogant

Key take a-ways and applications:

- The research on executive success is clear - successful executives are developed not hatched full grown. Wayne Calloway the late CEO of PepsiCo said, "I'll bet most of the companies that are in life-or-death battles got into that kind of trouble because they didn't pay enough attention to developing their leaders." Successful executive are active learners. They make mistakes but learn from their mistakes. So, run through the list of derailment factors on your key managers and if you see any red flags (similarities) – take corrective **developmental action** to prevent derailment and the costly financial and personal consequences.

- The following guidelines for behavioral change can help people change –

  Assess > Plan > Take Action > Re-Assess >:
  - Clearly identify the desired changes – identify the problem behavior(s) clearly?
  - Determine who can provide meaningful feedback
  - Collect feedback
  - Analyze results
  - Develop an action plan
  - Have the "candidate" respond to key stakeholder
  - Develop an ongoing follow-up and re-assessment process
  - Review results
  - Do it again until the new behavior is learned

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Bio:

Carl Robinson, Ph.D., has been in the business of helping people unlock and develop their hidden potential for over 20 years. Dr. Robinson uses researched-based motivational and performance enhancement technologies to help individuals and teams make enduring changes to help them achieve their individual and organization's goals.

He is a specialist in leadership and executive development in both team and individual settings, and his projects have included:

- Executive development
- Derailment turnarounds and prevention
- Career assessment and development
- Executive assessment and recruitment advice
- Leadership development strategy and implementation
- Executive team development
- Resolution of damaging relationship Improving the effectiveness of executive team/board relationships.
- Pre-promotional and succession planning evaluations and development
- Advising Board members and VCs regarding executive selection and development for portfolio companies

His clients come from a variety of industries and organizations but primarily centered on companies who offer intellectually based products in highly competitive volatile markets with people who are intelligent, creative and impatient.

Carl is currently writing a book on the personality differences between startup and mainstream executives to help boards and executive teams chose the right executive for the right stage of growth in companies. Bigby/Havis, the developers and distributors of the ASSESS Personality Survey is providing data analysis for this project.

He has a Bachelor's degree in Human Relations and Organizational Behavior from the University of San Francisco and, a Masters in Counseling Psychology from Vermont College and a Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology from the California Institute of Integral Studies. Counseling psychology is the branch of psychology that is concerned with the enhancement of human performance and the quality of life. His dissertation research investigated factors that influence creative thinking.

Carl is a member of the Consulting Psychology division of the American Psychological Association and a member of the Northwest Venture Group. He speaks nationally on a variety of topics related to organizational and leadership development. Recently, he was a panelist at the March, 2001, MIT Enterprise Forum – "Tales from the Crypt: Board/CEO Interactions. In August 2001, he will be speaking at the Young Entrepreneurs Organization (YEO) international meeting in Seattle. The Puget Sound Business Journal recently published Dr. Robinson's article – "Leading Effectively: Leadership Can Be Taught, But Commitment Needed."