

# Why You Need a Support Team in Your Life

By Tyler P. Cook, Ed.D.



Leadership is not for the faint of heart, and sometimes we find ourselves feeling stuck. As a result, we tend to feel the need to work through those things alone, whether out of embarrassment, the fear of appearing inadequate, or even believing the lie that the people closest to us will

look at us differently. In these moments, we will oftentimes do whatever it takes to make others believe we've got it all under control. However, this can lead to burnout, not managing our emotions well, or further isolating ourselves from those who really care about us.

But the truth is that leadership is not meant to be done alone. We need the people in our lives whom we trust to share the truth with us, support us in our journey, and speak into our lives about our “blind spots” that are stealing from us. However, this all starts with a humble invitation to welcome feedback into our lives, even when it's not always what we want to hear. Because usually, that's when we need to hear it the most.

## **Your Support Team**

There is such value in a personal community in a leader's life. Not solely for encouragement but for support and accountability. Reflect for a moment on those people in your circle whom you deeply trust to speak into your life. Maybe it's your spouse, a best friend, a fellow leader, or a mentor. Generally, this is not a large group of people, but an inner circle who knows you well and who are the ones that are there for you, thick or thin.

Do you give those people permission to share with you when they see you fading off course? More importantly, when they do, are you open to their feedback? One of the greatest catalysts for personal growth is our willingness to pull the veil back and welcome the feedback of others. Your support team is made up of people who believe in and care about you. This also means they care about you too much to let things rob you of your potential. They are not solely concerned about your personal successes but, first and foremost, care about you as a person. Those people in your life are a gift.

In the 1950s, psychologists Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingram developed a tool called the “Jahari Window” to serve as a map for the purpose of identifying and improving important components of our lives, such as self-awareness, personal development, communication, and interpersonal relationships. The premise of their work was to contribute to forming a complete understanding of ourselves, specifically

the blind spots in our lives that oftentimes hold us back from our full potential (Luft & Ingram, 1955). In their research, they emphasize that we in fact need others in our lives who see the things that we don't and communicate those things to us for the sake of our growth.

The reality is that we all have blind spots. These blind spots can affect virtually every area of our lives—our relationships, performance and growth. They can become the source of habits and patterns that often leave us stuck, whether we realize it or not. And as a result, we can't move forward or grow in an area that we don't even know exists.

## **The Value of Insight from Others**

Perhaps you are overcommitting in one area and leaving another facet of your life to suffer as a result. Maybe when addressing certain topics or people, you are not hitting the mark with your approach or intentions. Or perhaps you are simply wearing yourself out to the point that you are not bringing your best self to the most important things in your life. Your support team knows you and has your best interests in mind. They are the ones who are willing to say, “I see this area in your life that is holding you back from being who you intend to be. Would you be willing to take some time to reflect on this area?” The best part is that they do this from a place of love. That's what makes their feedback so incredibly powerful (Cook & Nesloney, 2023).



Bill George, author of *Discover Your True North*, shared that in challenging times, leaders need a solid network of trusted relationships with people available to counsel and care for them. This can give leaders confidence to listen to their inner voice, even when outsiders attack or criticize their decisions. A support team can provide resilience to get through challenging times and to recognize what is truly important in life (George, 2015).

Sometimes, you simply need people to be a sounding board and listen. Perhaps it's a gentle reminder to prioritize what matters most, which serves as a guide to staying true to your course and not letting the pressures, responsibilities or even critics in your life shift you away from where you are going.

### **360-Degree Feedback**

If you want to lead with authenticity and impact, leaning into feedback is essential. However, it can be uncomfortable at times. It doesn't always feel great to sense that someone is putting your shortcomings on display, so remember that it is a matter of perspective. Think of the relief you feel when a friend quietly saves you from the pepper or lettuce in your teeth. They are looking out for you because they have your back. They want what's best for you.

When it comes to welcoming feedback in your life, it starts with the humility to ask. Don't just assume people will tell you. Be willing to ask them questions. One powerful question to ask others is, "How do you experience me when..." Being specific in the areas you desire feedback in is helpful to those individuals who are supporting you. Maybe it is regarding your demeanor in a meeting or how you engage in difficult conversations. Or perhaps it is even regarding a relational dynamic. What if, during a conversation, a seemingly insignificant detail like your body language consistently conveyed a different meaning than you intended? You would want to know!

Research shows that when you are intentional about growing in the area of self-awareness, you are more equipped to foster healthy relationships, generate trust with those you lead, and develop deeper, more authentic connections with others (Gardner et al., 2005).

### **Take the Step**

Your support team in life is truly a gift. They are not simply there to slap your hand when you are off course, but they are there to encourage you, believe in you, and remind you of who you are when things inevitably get hard. They serve as your guardrails in your life. They are there to listen as well as



provide feedback. Don't discount the value of these people. Your growth and those you lead depend on it. So, who is on your support team, and have you invited them to speak into your life?

For additional information, please contact Dr. Cook at [tcCook@harborcreeksd.com](mailto:tcCook@harborcreeksd.com). ■

### **REFERENCES:**

- Cook, T., & Nesloney, T. (2023). *Building authenticity: A blueprint for the leader inside you*. Hanover, PA: ConnectEDD.
- Gardner, W.L., Avolio, B.J., Luthans, F., May, D.R., & Walumbwa, F. (2005). "Can you see the real me?" A self-based model of authentic leader and follower development. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 16(3), 343-372. 10.1016/j.leaqua.2005.03.003.
- George, B. (2015). *Discover your true north: Becoming an authentic leader*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Luft, J., & Ingham, H. (1955). The Johari Window: A Graphic Model of Interpersonal Awareness. *Proceedings of the Western Training Laboratory in Group Development*, 246, 2014-03.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Tyler P. Cook, Ed.D., serves as the Principal of Klein Elementary School in the Harbor Creek School District and is co-author of *Building Authenticity: A Blueprint for the Leader Inside You*. His passion is to equip and mobilize others to live and lead with authenticity, no matter their role. Through Dr. Cook's leadership, writing and speaking, he is committed to seeing every person grow to their fullest potential so they can impact the world around them. You can find him @drtylercook (Twitter, Instagram).