

Roles We Play

By

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A colleague of mine last year made me aware of something called role theory. Since I had no idea what she was talking about, I did a little research. I found that, in part, role theory addresses how a person's worth and potential is based on the roles they currently play in organizations.

To keep your job, for example, you may suppress your preferred behaviors to make changes or to take risks and, instead, play the more conservative role you are expected to play. But it isn't you. You are playing a role.

A more interesting view of roles is how you see others. When considering one of your employees, for example, do you see just a job description or do you see all that is possible or available in an individual? I mean what kind of jobs have they done in the past? What experience do they have that may not be necessary for the current job but may be of use now or later in other tasks or positions?

I often marvel at people in hiring positions who base their decisions only on what you have done last or what you currently do ... as if that tiny bit of information defines you.

Take Bob for example. After years of being a naval officer, a pilot, a strategic planner, a senior national policy officer, and a senior executive in large and small companies, he decided to do something fun for him. On a contract basis, he now trains people in a variety of business skills.

So, how do you think Bob is perceived now? Of course it is as a trainer, the latest thing he has done. If he wanted to get another corporate job he would likely be limited to training positions. But he is more than that... just as you are more and just as other people are more than we perceive them to be because of limited insights.

Tips:

1. Write down what you know about the people who work for you including your perceptions. Is that a lot or a little?
2. Sit down with each employee over time and get to know them.
3. Compare what you thought with what you now know. Do you now see them differently?
4. Ask yourself how you might use their capabilities in your organization differently.
5. Look at your own role. Does your boss' perception of you fit your capabilities?
6. If you are unsure how you are perceived or if you think you have more to offer, have a positive talk with your boss. Learn about each other.
7. Together, work out a plan that both challenges you and offers more to the organization.

People are like puzzles, made of a great number of parts. No single part describes what the whole looks like. If you take the time to look deeper you will likely find a wealth of resources and capabilities ready to be used... that you did not know existed.

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