

Investors Business Daily April 3, 2007

Michael Mink Mon Apr 2, 7:00 PM ET

Sometimes our greatest strengths can blind us to our most serious weaknesses.

That's the premise of Claudia Shelton's new book, "Blind Spots: Achieve Success by Seeing What You Can't See." Shelton is an executive coach and president of the Hopewell Group.

Shelton cites a salesman who put up great numbers, but didn't place much value on turning in reports in a timely matter or attending all meetings. He figured his sales prowess would earn him a promotion to sales manager. He was wrong -- until he focused more on what his higher-ups valued.

"In a competitive situation, you need to know what your boss holds as most important. That may be very different from the way you see the job," Shelton said.

Reading your boss and understanding what he values is one way to avoid blind spots. Other ways:

Evaluate routines. Don't rely on what made you successful but is no longer effective, Shelton writes. "Old habits are the most difficult blind spots to uncover because they are ways of thinking and acting that have become fixed," she said.

Evaluate your behavior. This is especially true when you're under stress. Be aware of how your actions are affecting others around you. The blind spot here is that you still might be performing your duties at a high level, but you're losing stature in the firm at the same time.

Communicate with others. Don't let your strengths blind you to things like not listening. "The most common blind spot I see comes from people overusing their strengths," Shelton said.

A not-so-funny thing happened to Nancy Widmann, the first female president at CBS Radio, on her way to induction in the New York State Broadcasters Association's Hall of Fame. She was fired when Westinghouse bought CBS.

It was a profound experience, and led her to co-author "I Didn't See It Coming: The Only Book You'll Ever Need to Avoid Being Blindsided in Business," written with Elaine Eisenman and Amy Kopelan.

"Everyone, at some point, has an 'I didn't see it coming moment,'" Widmann said. "There are several critical times when you should be at high alert."

These include:

An ownership change. When your company is in this process, there can be pressure for short-term profit to make it more attractive for sale, Widmann says. Once the new ownership is in place, the acquirer makes the rules.

A new boss. The new leader might bring new people and arrive with a mandate for change.

Also, "you have a very short time to make your impression with a new boss. That's why it's particularly dangerous," Widmann said.

A new position. A change in responsibilities or a promotion is "a critical time, and one that people overlook as a real possibility for being blindsided," Widmann said.

New duties could put you under a management microscope or come with tough profit goals. Remember, "it's always about the money," so follow the money, Widmann said.

She added: "Always have an exit strategy. It doesn't always mean you'll need to use it, but have it."

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