

# LEADERSHIP BLIND SPOTS

*When you don't know  
what you don't know*



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# What's a blind spot?

Much of today's business world is predicated on high achievement, competitiveness and constant drive for success. And that's no bad thing: that's what gets the job done, brings in profit and changes the world. But it also leaves little room for self-reflection. The very best leaders must also be able to acknowledge that they're only human, and as a result, are naturally motivated by some aspects of their role over others. And it's in those gaps of attention that blind spots occur.

Let me explain with a metaphor to show what I mean. When we learn to drive, an instructor explains that there's a blind spot we need to check so that we navigate the roads safely and successfully. But when learning to be a leader – because leadership is a skill that

needs to be honed over time – people aren't always told that they have leadership blind spots – that is, those elements of business that get overlooked when focusing on something else that's more enjoyable and motivating.

If unacknowledged, these blind spots prevent leaders from achieving their full potential. And if not dealt with, they can be a significant risk, not only to the individual leader's career, but also to a business's overall success.

*The very best leaders must also be able to acknowledge that they're only human.* 

## Case Study #1

### Getting promoted into a leadership role can reveal blind spots

A highly talented engineer was promoted to leading a global project, but unfortunately, the skills that got him to that point weren't the skills he needed for the next phase of his career. As an engineer, his orientation towards detail and reflection were preventing him from moving agilely. He was also low on big picture thinking, which was required of this project.

His speed was also being hampered by a high preference for patience and a desire to be liked. He also had a tendency to let a period of time pass – hours, days, weeks, and even months – before being convinced. This slowed down his ability to make quick decisions.

His company engaged a leadership coach to help him increase his speed by reorienting his preference for detail towards a preference for big picture and breadth – that is, the ability to gain energy and be motivated by overseeing the whole project rather just the finer details. He also



worked on increasing his assertiveness so he could feel more comfortable in his new management role telling people what to do and coaching his team more effectively, passing on his skills. In addition, he spent time becoming more aware of the business context of time spent in

decision-making, learning when it was important to trust people and the information he'd received, thereby speeding up his decision-making ability.

## So, if you can't see it, how do you know it's there? Identifying blind spots

It's easy to identify your blind spot with the right tools and guidance. Blind spots can be identified through a revolutionary platform called [Fingerprint for Success](#), a people analytics tool that allows leaders to find out what motivates them most in a work context, and also – crucially – how they measure up against other successful business leaders and entrepreneurs and where they might be falling short of their ideal performance.



The **Fingerprint for Success** tool allows leaders who are motivated to continuously improve their performance and achieve their goals to get a 360° view of their motivational metrics. It's surprising and fascinating to see how your workplace preferences can be a predictor of success or failure.

### Some examples that the platform identifies include:

- *Not enough focus on money. Sounds like common sense, but if a business leader doesn't have enough interest in the financial aspects of the business, they're more likely to fail. The study behind Fingerprint for Success found that successful entrepreneurs have a very high focus on money, compared with the rest of the population.*
- *Those who trust their gut feelings are likely to be more successful in a fledging business, but those who do the same within a mature company are more likely to experience financial loss: as a result, people who trust their instinct too much in a mature organization risk ignoring important information from external sources.*
- *A high preference for following the rules means that leaders are less likely to succeed: the greatest leaders are rarely known for their ability to follow a script. Being too focused on following the rules creates blind spot in the area of innovation.*



SPOTLIGHT



### **Blind spots aren't flaws**

It's important to note that blind spots aren't flaws or weaknesses. Everyone has them, and something that's a blind spot within a business context may actually work in your favour in other contexts. For example, a strong preference for working in a group has been found to be a blind spot for business leaders – but could be extremely valuable within a sports team.

I prefer to see blind spots as simply an opportunity to learn and grow as a leader, and to get some 'inside' information that will help your organization in ways you can't anticipate if you never take the time to learn about them.

## **Unknown, but not unknowable: How paying attention to your blind spots can help you thrive**

Once you're familiar with your blind spots, it's possible to mitigate them. Instead of being unaware of what you don't know, meaning that leaders can take decisive action to make sure they're performing optimally. One option is to make strategic hires – getting people with complementary motivations into the business so they can be

vigilant in making sure that you don't derail as a result of your blind spots.

Another option is working with an experienced and trained coach who can create a bespoke development plan so you can overcome your blind spots, enabling you to gain more energy and motivation – which leads to better performance. Such intervention takes time and focus to reprogram yourself, but is extremely rewarding.

## Case Study #2

### Blind spots around personal relationships can lead to overwhelm



A high-ranking VP had two roles within his business and was experiencing overwhelm and overload. A look at his blind spots revealed that he scored very low initiation and very high on reflection and patience, preferring to wait and be patient rather than to think on his feet and act, which was killing his ability to move with speed.

He was also not motivated for big picture thinking, and was 70% less motivated by the large abstract chunks of information than best practice leaders. All of his natural programming showed and confirmed why he was feeling overwhelmed and was slow to act and get stuff done.

On top of all this, he was also highly motivated by affiliation (i.e. a strong desire to connect, belong and be liked), and his power motivation – a critical motivation that determines your success as a leader – was very low. This meant that his reports didn't necessarily respect him, and he let it slide because he preferred to be liked.

He engaged a coach in order to help him deal with these motivations. The first move was to get over the overwhelm. That required him to get out of the details and into the big picture, delegating more and taking a bird's-eye view.

With focused coaching to increase his motivation for power and reduce his desire to be liked, he worked on the idea that it's more important for him to be respected than to be popular. He has now gained respect and is getting things done through others and is feeling far less overwhelmed in his role.

## Three ways to pay better attention to your blind spots

Learning to look at your blind spots is tough, but rewarding. Here are the top three ways to get better at observing your blind spots:

- 1** Using the Fingerprint for Success tool to find out where your blind spots in business are, and use the tool to train yourself, checking in on your progress regularly.
- 2** Hire team members who have complementary motivations, that is, people who are motivated where you have a blind spot and who can keep you in check.
- 3** Engage a coach with strong training in behavioral change who can give you exercises and direction to change your blind spots.





Learning about your blind spots is taking a step into the unknown. It can be daunting to find out things you didn't know about yourself, and even more challenging when you find out how your preferred motivational style might be affecting your leadership and business.

But in order to grow and achieve more for yourself and for your business, you must travel to these unknown places, and look them squarely in the face.

*You can sign up for Blindspot Breakthrough Coaching.  
Book your session now by emailing  
[timothy@carrollconsultancy.com](mailto:timothy@carrollconsultancy.com).*

**References**

*Fingerprint for Success. 2016. Can Entrepreneurial Success be Predicted?  
Benchmarking the motivations of successful entrepreneurs and business builders.*

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Timothy can hardly remember a time when leadership and performance weren't important themes in life. The son of an entrepreneur, he was raised in an environment where leadership values were prized, and no one was surprised when, later in life, Timothy started a successful business of his own. An avid sportsman from childhood, Timothy mastered Barefoot Waterskiing and was chosen at just 16 years old to represent New Zealand. He later went on to compete at four World Championships. By his early 20s, Timothy had already started fashioning his own philosophy of leadership as a way of being – something that stems not from external forces, but from personal patterns of thought and behaviour.*

*After working in the personal/professional development industry in Australia and studying cognitive behavioural sciences and self-actualizing psychology, Timothy founded the Carroll Consultancy Group. Today, he is a recognized expert in organisational and behavioural change, and has helped some of Europe's most successful organisations dramatically develop their people and performance. In addition to corporate clients such as Schneider Electric Group, KAEFER Group, Yellow Pages and Philips Lighting, Timothy has worked with PGA of Sweden and the Swedish Golf Federation and continued to coach a number of elite athletes. In 2008, he served as performance coach for a Swedish equestrian eventing rider at the Beijing Olympics.*

*Timothy believes you should never stop learning, and he has continually sought out the best in the world to learn from. He has devoted his career to sharing his insights with people who aspire to lead in the corporate world and the world of sports. Timothy's genuineness, experience, passion for growth and "Down Under" personality make him a natural and comfortable person to work with.*

