

the whole. Have you got a group that includes a Lodestone, Educator, Anchor and Deliverer?

Vivienne Durham, headmistress at Francis Holland School in London, is clear that her senior team of five clearly reflects who she is and who she is not:

They are the most important part of me doing the job, the people who work most closely to me. They've got to be as good as you can get and they've got to be complementary to you. Until she joined me, my academic deputy was head of Maths at North London Collegiate and she's really detailed, really methodical, loves graphs, loves charts, all the things I'm not. I have another person who is strong on providing the general, the overview, and who is calm, positive, not an anxious personality, different from me.

Durham actually has an extraordinary calm herself, particularly in a crisis, leading from the front when her school was subject to great uncertainty because of its proximity to the London bombings of 7 July 2005. Durham feels that reliance on the A alone in a crisis leaves operations unnecessarily vulnerable, so she places great emphasis on the need for the strongest possible C around her:

My number two, my deputy, is very like me in lots of ways. I wouldn't think twice in a crisis. I would do what I had to do and she'd run the show. In that situation, your number two runs the show. You've got to have somebody in whom you've got absolute confidence ... like in any good business you need a great deputy, the co-pilot that flies the plane. You take the chief executive or the pilot for granted but what if a pilot has a cardiac arrest?

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take those briefings seriously. I used to think through every question because I knew they wanted to catch me out every day. After this briefing on the Genome Project, suddenly left, right and centre, share values were being wiped off these big science companies. I just went to Tony and said, 'I'm really sorry about that.' Another time I was with Gordon – something with Gordon – I can't remember what the story was, but it was just a bit of a disaster – and I went to both of them and said, 'I'm very sorry about this.' And both of them said, 'Let's be honest, it's amazing you don't fuck up more than you do.'

Instant forgiveness in the face of failure buys the A large doses of loyalty. The good C is perfectly capable of chastising himself, learning from the episode and getting it right next time. Peter Murray, special adviser to Blair's former business minister, Nigel Griffiths, distinguishes between ministers who do and don't stand up for their Cs:

I've worked for three ministers now. Nigel told me on day one, 'If you fuck up I'll back you up.' I needed to know that and I believed him because he knew that that was the only way that it worked. With others you know it won't work like that. Look at what happened with Jeremy Hunt's guy: 'I'll look after you in due course but, right now, you're going to have to take the bullet.' And he did. And I would still take a bullet for Nigel, even though I've moved on and so has he.

Vivienne Durham is supportive of her senior team:

I say to them, 'you may make a mistake but, conceptually, if there's a mistake made, it's not you because I trust you always to have done your absolute best. If I've appointed you at senior

level, I know or I believe, arrogantly, that you'll have wanted to do your absolute best for the place. So, if it's gone wrong, we're in it together, just come in and tell me.'

If you make your Cs live in fear of failure, you will hold them back and inhibit their boldest moves. By crippling their adventurous wanderings, you may close the door on your next best move. Oliver Hardy never discovered his C's true potential. By chastising Stan Laurel with the catchphrase admonishment, 'Well, here's another nice mess you've gotten me into!', Hardy left his hapless, confused C crying like a baby.

Conflict resolution

Most relationships will at some stage come under strain, resulting in their not functioning optimally, and both partners will in some way be responsible. Partners will produce what Alissa Goodman and Ellen Greaves call 'negative interaction cycles'. The A and the C together can resolve conflict in their relationship by first of all acknowledging that a problem exists and getting it out in the open. Might you have a relationship problem? How might you know?

If you have a robust constitution, you could adopt the system used by David Brailsford, introduced by Dr Steve Peters, a clinical psychiatrist with experience working with mass murderers and psychopaths. Brailsford describes Peters' quality as an Anchor:

He wouldn't hold back, he was just blunt in terms of 'Right, okay Dave, listen, I've seen three or four people today, very upset with you. You've really dropped the bomb here, and these are the issues, and you said, this, this and this and it's been taken like this and they are furious.' And, I'd be like,

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to another leader, the stakes are high. You need to choose your A carefully.

Casting your fantasy A

What is your brief? Right now in your career, what kind of A would be best for you? One to give you the chance, as a Lodestone, to become a better Deliverer? Or one who needs an Educator, who will help you on your way to Anchorhood? Are you after an easy ride, looking for an A you can trust, one who is emotionally rock solid, still adored by his parents, with no trace of self-doubt? You may be looking for a while. In any event, how dull a life would that be for an ambitious C? What kind of a test of your own abilities? Wouldn't you prefer an A with some edge, one who can develop you into an A if you choose to go in that direction? Was it by chance or foresight that on her way to becoming a headmistress, Vivienne Durham worked for four headmistresses that served as president of The Girls' Schools Association, which represents independent girls' schools in the UK? Only one out of 250 every year becomes, in effect, the head of heads. Durham worked for four of them. If you want to be an A, find yourself an A of As.

The A may be the one running the casting session, but that doesn't stop you doing your research. The discipline of due diligence, developed to serve companies wishing to buy other companies, is rarely exacted by those about to make significant career decisions. An exhaustive search of the press cuttings may not reveal much more than the creation of the corporate affairs function. Off-the-record phone calls to your A's previous Cs, in an attempt to probe their strengths and weaknesses, should get to some of the truth, but the exes will probably hold back on you. Moreover, whatever you have read or heard, vanity will override most of your misgivings

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I have a very special relationship with Nicki. It is a friendship that has lasted for almost two decades and that will continue forever. I would trust Nicki with my life. We have been good for each other over the years and we know exactly how each of us functions very well. It is a very relaxed and special friendship, powerful and effective in work and easy and fun socially. We enjoy the same things in life, travel, good food, relaxing and being with our friends and family.

Does your boss want you to be their friend? Olympic cyclist Victoria Pendleton valued friendship with her former coach, Scott Gardner, so much that she married him. Constancy does not demand quite this level of affection. Most As I interviewed recognised that there is a limit to how close they can get to their Cs because, at the end of the day, they are in charge. Vivienne Durham distinguishes between being friendly and having friends:

The only time staff members can *really* become friends is when they leave the school or I leave the school. I've definitely had employees who've turned into friends. We've been hugely friendly when we've been here but I never quite let myself believe they're friends because, actually, first and foremost I'm their employer. I'm paid to be their employer on behalf of the governors.

As a C you owe the A enough social distance to ensure that in a disagreement their view does not prevail simply because you like them. Being an occasional thorn in their side, rather than a constant echo in their head, will make you a better friend anyway. 'What kind of friendship?' is a question worth exploring. Cs should not expect the depth of friendship that