



# ***CHIEF'S FILE CABINET***

***Ronny J. Coleman***

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## **Getting Your "C" Legs**

Have you ever been aboard a ship that has gone to sea? For the first couple of hours, in some cases days, it's a real miserable experience. Some people get seasick. Others soon learn that the rolling, pitching deck of the ship is a phenomenon that requires a different balancing act in walking. Landlubbers who learn how to cope with the problem soon learn to go with the flow of movement. Their balance is restored. The only problem is that once they come back to shore, they must learn to walk on land all over again.

What's involved here is development of skills and abilities to survive. It's about gaining new skills and abilities. For without a skilled work force the most grandiose of plans are irrelevant. Our people must be able to adapt to adopt. How we behave towards creating a learning atmosphere for subordinates either helps or hinders the development of their skill levels. And, by the way, it also affects our own ability to adapt to the very plans we create ourselves.

I have given this little model the term "The C Curve". This curve has five behavioral modes, too. They are arrayed from classifying, counseling, competency assurance, creative and challenging. This array is focused on the behavior you must demonstrate towards others if you want them to follow suit. In other words, the C chart is a lead-by-example client. Where you are in the chart of ten determines where your people are on the chart.

The "bubble" on this chart is the competency mode. Competency is a behavior that's based on possessing the right skills to do the job at the time the skills are required. The competency mode is best demonstrated when a person is clearly capable of achieving what is expected of them at the time. Competency is not a reflection of a person's potential, only of their ability to perform according to expectations. That's why it is important to demonstrate competency on a day-to-day basis. It is where a person's reputation for reliability and dependability comes from. The left side of this chart is reserved for remedial action for either yourself or subordinates. It consists of two modes. The first is counseling and the far left is classifying.

In the case of counseling, the preferred behavior is to look upon our skill deficiencies as a case of inappropriate preparation. In this mode an individual deserves a chance to learn about what they do not know in order to become an effective member of the team. In our own case, as the leader of a group, we need to be aware of our own limitations and be willing to seek counsel of others when we are operating in an area of unfamiliarity.



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Classifying behavior means that a person has need to define their weaknesses in a very specific way. The best reaction to a person that is not keeping up with the pack is to be real specific about what you need to see improved on their part.

If we find ourselves in a situation where people can easily achieve what we task them with, we need to raise the goal a little higher. That way the two behaviors in the right side of this chart are aimed at stretching people's skill range. Asking them to solve problems using new skill levels requires creativity on both your and the employees' parts. Creativity in this area doesn't mean artistry and ambiguous ideation. It means finding new ways of doing old tasks. The behavior we need to create in ourselves, and in our subordinates, is a sort of professional curiosity that spurs people into new innovations and development of new skills.

The last element here is the challenge. It essentially is the posting of an almost unachievable goal, accompanied by the enthusiastic pursuit of its accomplishment. Not achieving a visionary goal is not considered a failure in the behavioral area. Instead, it's viewed as an opportunity to continue to develop new skills, new techniques and new methods to climb to higher levels of capability.

The range of behavior in the C chart goes between counseling and creativity almost with a rebound effect. As a matter of course you need to be assessing weaknesses and pushing the limits almost simultaneously. Focusing too long on either one of them leads to an organization that either is in training all of the time, or an organization that loses its ability to keep up with the technology over time.

The behavior to be preferred here is to be able to demonstrate competency in a broad range of tasks on a day-to-day basis. Knowing that you have the ability to handle almost anything that can come your way is a great thing for confidence, but don't kid yourself either. Make sure that you are competent.