





be absorbed in our own issues. But putting yourself in the shoes of someone who is very busy is essential, if what is intended is to have their attention to give them a chance to grow. Most people try, automatically, to send an email to a common contact, or ask to be granted a phone call. Instead, they should think about what they need, what a powerful person wants, and offer them specific help. In fact, it's a tactical lesson I learned from Hoffman. Sometimes it's as simple as saying, "I'd like to know your opinion about something I'm working on?", or "I know you talked about this and I'd like to introduce you to someone I think you might be interested in." In fact, if what is intended is to capture the attention of powerful people, we must not succumb to the preconception that there is nothing that can be done for them. You have to find a way to help them, be it Reid Hoffman or Bill Gates. And the way to do it is with creativity and empathy. Putting yourself on their shoes. Giving them something that is really useful to them, that gives them information and intelligence, or a piece of information they cannot pay for.

**You once admitted to having learned from Hoffman that for every weakness, there is a strength related. Do you really think that's the way it is?**

Most successful people tend to be reflective and they do the basic exercise of Strengths and Weaknesses. There are two tendencies in this matter: some individuals focus on their weaknesses and try to overcome them. Others focus on their strengths and try to make the most out of them. Both are praiseworthy, but Hoffman taught me that, in reality, strengths and weaknesses are connected. He, for example, is extremely creative: he has a million ideas per minute, some can be bad, a couple really good, but most are great. However, he is also incredibly messy. And what you have to understand is that you need that dose of chaos to unleash your creativity. We must respect this crazy pace, because it is what allows him to reflect his strengths. In other words, each weakness has a strength that balances it. Therefore, a good lesson is to look for the other side of the coin of weaknesses. Being introverted, for example, does not have to be a problem. It's a matter of finding strength. Maybe that person is great in one-on-one conversations. You have to see the other side to it.

**What you suggest is related to the concept of "perpetual beta"?**

With Hoffman we always say that "we live in a perpetual beta". We tend to think "I have flaws, I have weaknesses". Beta means, precisely, "think about what you do wrong and try to do it better". Perceived in this way, the concept tends to generate negative thoughts, and in reality it is just a way of seeing it. A more optimistic view would be: I have potential, I have the power to make my life better. Identity is a very powerful thing. People define themselves "I'm a Republican, I'm a Christian, I'm American." And those identities shape them. But being in a perpetual beta means accepting that our life is "under construction", an idea that is related to never stop learning, or progressing. The same happens in companies: the

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goal is to continually adapt to the next big opportunity. So, also for them to live in perpetual beta is positive, given that it allows them to constantly improve and, therefore, stay competitive.

#### **Do you think that this vision of constant improvement is something that organizations tend to pursue?**

Hoffman always insisted that one of my tasks was to tell the truth. Once, during a job for a company that had a very famous CEO, I attended a meeting with other important CEOs, and it was actually badly organized and it was a waste of time. At the end, I approached the chief of staff and asked her what was the best way to get her my feedback on the meeting. “I do not understand what you mean,” she told me. I answered the truth: that I had ideas about how a meeting could be handled better, and that I wanted to comment on them. Her reply was that the CEO was not interested in receiving feedback with criticism. I am sure that this CEO, in his speeches, says that he is always willing to improve. But in the face of a reaction like the one I received, one realizes that while things are going well, few leaders accept being told about how to be better.

#### **Could you comment on the conclusions of your study on the cultural values of organizations?**

We always hear speeches from managers about the values of their companies: excellence, integrity, among others. I do not question those values, but I learned that those who really form the culture are those who have a counterpart. Many people work on LinkedIn, for example, just because Hoffman is a great person, a man of good heart. This is part of the company’s DNA, and it becomes a differential aspect, because many good people want to join their ranks. The positive side is that they are fun and collaborative people by nature. The counterpart, although not the case of LinkedIn, is that these people may not be competitive enough or lacking the desire to win. Another example is that of a culture focused on consensus versus an autocratic one. Consensus is a value, but it has a disadvantage: it delays decision making. In turn, the autocracy can be faster, but depends on a single person, and therefore is not durable over time. So, if we want to understand how an organization works, we should not pay attention to the values it preaches on its website, but try to understand the ambivalent dynamics that are the ones that truly shape its culture. When a leader speaks to employees, he wants to be clear about what makes the company unique. He wants to make sure that he emphasizes those values that distinguish the company. But he should take into account the other face of those values. Because only in this way it is possible to know that these are real values and not corporate speeches.

#### **How important is trust in the workplace?**

The million dollar question is with whom we associate in life, with whom we work. In the business world, the basic ideas are: should I work with friends? Do I hire a University acquaintance who has no experience for the position, but whom I

know and trust? In a context of great uncertainty, changes and competition, the key lies in acting quickly; therefore, trust is fundamental. If on a scale of 1 to 10, the acquaintance scores an 8 in trust and a 6 in competences, I would choose it over one that has a 6 in trust and a 9 in competences. In other words, I think it’s easier to move quickly with someone you trust. And trust is something that costs a lot to build. That’s why there are successful businesses among friends.

#### **What role do the people who accompany the leader in an organization play?**

The people around leaders change them in many ways, but always in an unconscious way. To become the person we want to be, it is advisable to work with individuals who already have those qualities. We are the average of the five people with whom we spend more time; we are shaped by the people around us. Therefore, the quickest way to know who we are today, and who we will become in the future, is to ask ourselves whom we hang out with. And if we work from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. with certain people, those people are key in our lives. Do we feel comfortable with them? If not, it is best to change jobs as soon as possible. Because beyond how many books we read or how many conferences we attend, nothing will impact our lives as much as the people we spend more time with. ▀

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