



## CHAMPION MATERIAL

How management consulting can help identify and coach business champions

For the company's 5th anniversary

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Seattle, WA

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Hello,

What motivated me to write this report is that many of my clients have summoned me to their office and, after having closed the door tightly, asked: "Liana, how do you do THAT?" I tried to get away with jokes at first, but then I figured that I really needed to give it more a thought and come up with a sensible answer. What do we do that is unique and different that helps us be successful on client assignments, and helps clients become so much more successful and recognized?

I approached this question with my Board of Advisors member, seasoned HR executive and career coach, Mr. Batiste. Since Ernest already knew me by work in the office, he made a surprising proposal to observe my coaching in the equestrian ring. After having observed several of my coaching sessions, Ernest concluded: "You are most productive when you coach and develop people into champions. Simply do the same in your management consulting practice. Select executives solving business problems and treat them as champion material. Add people with a similar consulting approach to your team, and your company will make a solid footprint." This not only closed a loop for me in terms of transferability of my sport or business coaching skills into a management consulting business, but also raised the bar for me and my consulting company a few notches higher. There is a big difference between assisting and coaching (on the same subject.)

Later, as I have been consciously articulating Copernici's approach to management consulting for prospective clients, it has become apparent that developing champions and reputation management are two very attention grabbing subjects. Yet, generally we do not offer this service on a standalone basis. It is available to Copernici corporate clients as an additional statement of work or, at times, as a complimentary item to the primary business strategy formulation, marketing planning, or sales enablement assignments. In some cases we can work directly with an individual, keeping our engagement confidential. I hope you find this report useful, and please feel free to contact me should you like to discuss the topic further.

Best,

*Liana Antanovich*

## BUSINESS AS A SPORT

This last week of February I went to the 2014 Channel Partner Conference and Expo in Las Vegas, a technical conference (noting this for those who do not know about it). In four days of the conference, I would introduce myself as “Managing Director at Copernici, a management consulting firm.” At sporting events, however, I typically introduce myself as a “Sponsor and Coach at Equestrian Insider.” My personal Facebook account for several years has listed both of my roles. Yet with people now so empowered by and having mastered smartphones, they are quick to check one another’s personal and corporate profiles in media, be it LinkedIn, Facebook, Google or Bing search, etc., resulting inevitably in clarifying questions. A few respected high-tech industry players asked me, to my surprise, “Why do I coach a sport and make money in management consulting? Is there any skills overlap? What skills of an equestrian sport coach do I leverage in my management consulting practice?”

Since it has become a frequently asked question, I decided to capture my answer. Sport and business have a lot in common. In fact, business is regarded as a combination of sport and war. (The notion of business as a combination of sport and war was perhaps first attributed to Emile Herzog (1885-1967), a French author who used the pen name, Andre Maurois.)

### Business as a war – getting out of “red”

When a business is in the red because of smart maneuvers by its competitors, or because of its own strategic ineptitude, intense disdain for the competition emerges. It is the mindset of a company in a “turnaround.” Desperate times require desperate measures. As in war, a common enemy is a great place to unify and motivate a team behind a worthy cause. At the time, a cause is survival.

### Business as a sport – market dominance or leap into the future

As for sport, the game of market share is an easy way to track success. Companies put their best efforts into creative and strategic maneuvers to tip the scales in their favor. With only 100% available to the players of the market share game, you know whether your play(s) made you a winner or a loser. But there is a delusion in concluding that market share is the “be all and end all” of business success. Classical proponents believe that dominant market share creates competitive advantage because of marketplace leverage and economies of scale. However, the new economy doesn’t operate that way. Sure, companies will work hard at improving their competitive positions within existing markets. Successful companies, though, will have leaders who are farsighted. Their horizon is markets that do not yet exist. The key is to get to that future first. No one has done this better than Apple. They think big and they think bold. Not Blackberry Bold. Really bold.

## CHAMPIONS IN SPORT AND BUSINESS

Success in business does not have to hinge on the sport and war analogy. Yes, that mindset worked for many executives and talented managers when the hungry wolf was at the door. But often it is senseless to engage in bitter wars that challenged margins. Competitors do not have to fail; they, too, can make a profit. But they cannot be permitted to lead; make them play catch-up to your company's strategic innovation. That's how champions play the game.

### Champions need to be chiseled

The reality is that very few have the ability to become champions on their own. As management consultants, we make champions -- we develop, find, coach, cajole, discipline, plan, and we make our client's team (or an individual) better. Look at the Seahawks. Like all football teams they are populated with great athletes who have all succeeded at something or another in their respective careers – the point being that the talent is usually there. How does one coalesce them into a winning group? One simple and effective way is find players who fit your scheme . . . or you could mold players to fit your scheme . . . or (and this is Ernest Batiste's favorite) you make a viable scheme using the talents of the players you have. The parallels to business are visible, viable, and noteworthy.

So, a manager steps into the spotlight here as a champion's sponsor and sculpture artist with a chisel. However, the truth is that not all managers can develop champions, or teach or train others at all. It is equally true that, at times, it is not in their best interests to do so, or it might contradict their mix of secondary emotional benefits.

Having "champion DNA" is actually a very hard way of living (because of the friction with the environment, they can rarely "fit in", fitting in is not their prime objective). Champions have desires burning within them that are much greater than most. Because they by definition differentiate in order to achieve, overachieve, and live in the future today, they burn their Mega Watts of energy with a much higher speed, and need help learning how to productively apply their talents. They need to learn how to develop their strengths and apply the whole mix on a daily basis, and they need strong determined sponsors (economic buyers for their output) in an organization or in sport to create space and opportunities for them, and to protect them, even when they fail.

The Champion Maker (again, a Mr. Batiste phrase) is what we strive to be as a leader and a trainer. The excessive use of the word "champion" should be mandated – not to a degree where it becomes hackneyed or verbal excess, but as a way of changing the mindset of the manager.

There is a saying: "What one has not learned at home, life teaches that." This is where a management consultant joins the line of Champion Makers on our scene.

## Champions empowered by management consultants

We consider and evaluate every one of our prospective clients as a champion candidate before our Copernici team decides to take on a client engagement. The evaluation needs to be quite positive for Copernici to vote on taking an assignment with inquiring prospect. So long as the champion material is there, we work with Fortune 500 companies, as well as mid-market and small businesses.

As we discuss and sign the paperwork for assignments to assist in business strategy, marketing, sales, or brand and reputation management, we first of all profile leading individual(s) on a prospective client side. Why? Because the key objective in Copernici's mission is to raise and enable prospective and current business champions, whether they are individuals, teams or organizations.

This is where sport coaching skills and approaches come to play. This is why almost a third of Copernici's team and Board of Advisors have coaching backgrounds in either sports or business, in addition to their vast knowledge of and careers in general management, functional and people management.

We use the coaching skill set that is most appropriate to our clients' advantage, sewing it into our daily work while researching or mining data, multiplying PowerPoint presentations of non-sharable sizes, corrupting magnificently capable Excel spreadsheets, or discussing a client's offering with its customers and partners over sunrise breakfasts, endless lunches, and late dinners. Talk about management meetings or international group calls . . .

## Consultant as a resource, an advisor, and a coach

If you play sports, and I'd assume most do, you know that your coach is almost everything to you. I say "almost," because you are paying your trainer a fee, and not vice versa. Your coach gives you tools and methodologies, designs your individual training schedule on a training scale, pushes you hard to your limits, but not over the limits, raises your competitive level and packs your calendar with show entries, has your back, works hard with you on building your reputation and circle of fans and loyal stakeholders, dusts off your white running shoes, but then pushes you off a boat into the ice-cold sound, and while yelling that your brain is not connected to your action.

Sound familiar? Well, it is the same in business when you hire Copernici as management consulting help. For better or for worse you have been identified as a champion or champion material. If you are considering hiring Copernici, be ready for this kind of treatment, expect no mercy. Because it is our time, our investment, and if we agreed to invest into you, you must succeed.

## WORKING WITH A CHAMPION MATERIAL

Human relationships can be stormy: strong people often leave a trail of unhappy gossipers, and sometimes people form groups of “resistance”. Strong people are not always being “liked”. And yes, no one has yet cancelled a team formation maturity life-cycle of Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing. So, Copernici consultants would aim to help influence shortening the Storming stage, neutralizing “resistance”, and letting the ideas implement, but grasping how we do it in a clear statement was a challenge. Below are a few viewpoints about how we work with a champion material.

### Crashing traditional hierarchy

A management consulting assignment involves relative positioning of a consultant or a consulting team and linked champion, and positioning of this link to the rest of the organization. In America’s enterprise world, with its predominant machine bureaucracy culture, somebody is always “working for” somebody. This does not apply to the coaching principles of management consulting that we so successfully deploy here at Copernici. Copernici is like a centaur. We can graze numbers and formulas on your Excel spreadsheets, kick charts into PowerPoint presentations, make conspicuous notes in meetings, gallop for a meeting in a building across the city, pull, fight, bite, carry, transport, process, fly anywhere in the sky with a Chairman and the Board, in any weather. We can swim to the deepest points in the engineering, operational or R&D Ocean. We can do almost all the work for you and your team. We can participate in government, keynote speak at a conference totally not from your industry, and then publish books in our spare time. Does this sound like a change agent? You tell me . . .

Our champion and linked management consulting team is an organic entity, teamed up to achieve a mega outcome, and to elevate a champion to a new level of self-awareness, consciousness and capacity. There is a champion maturity training scale; we’ll talk about it later in this report.

For the rest of the organization the new linked structure should be positioned as a ‘special mission team’ with the right of way, lest somebody would be run over. If the initially announced positioning is not clear, or somebody in an organization cannot make a paradigm shift from past SLAs between individuals, teams, and divisional units, repositioning happens -- usually in 1:1 meetings or calls. (Some structures in an organization can become threatened. Dealing with them is an acupuncture practice.)

There are a few critical moments during the tenure of a new “co-being” entity (champion material + management consultants), when devoted support from a Sponsor – somebody a level or a few levels above a champion’s manager - with a personal, vested interest into the mission and that particular champion’s

development, is crucial for the success of the newly formed team's mission, and a champion's career.

## To champions, rules do not apply

I can hear HR folks object to the subject of this section, but hold on for a minute and bear with me. I worked in HR and managed HR, and creating and tuning HR policies and procedures, including commitments setting, performance evaluation, people development, training and career management used to be my favorite subjects. Life experiences, however, have also taught me some other, "street-smart" lessons.

One of these lessons is that common dimensions, organizational or group values and rules do not apply to champion material, if you want to develop them into something amazing. Their set of talents is different, often unique. Important is to study the ways they perceive, process, and disseminate the information, how they influence others. Then go on leveraging their strengths.

Often, very often I see that champion material's set of talents and strengths is either misidentified, misunderstood, misinterpreted, or all of these at once.

We at Copernici find the champion material not only among those occupying the front shiny bench with a back shelf crowded with all kinds of awards (in this front row I often bump into masters of taking other people's credit, although despite the corporate systems and politics some champions truly make their way up here). We find champions among beat up, under resourced, barely surviving or fiercely fighting hard working individuals, or even among those who look totally mute.

Champion material individuals are often (but not always) very gifted, extraordinarily talented in some areas with significant or even glaring "areas needing development". If a corporate system supports their mix of skills, they thrive. If not, they contribute despite the odds in a survival mode. I bet many of my readers can relate to this statement referring back to a chapter or two in their careers.

What happens for somebody who is very much advanced in one or a few qualities is that they consider their level as a base line. This is how we are all born. The way we are is "normal". Any deviation from that norm is "weird", and needs to be "dealt with" in an offensive, defensive, aggressive or political way. This creates unhelpful friction with other stakeholders, teams, or corporate systems.

Copernici's answer to this predicament is designing management consulting approaches to business strategy, marketing, sales enablement or brand and reputation management (well, that is relatively easy) while taking into account influential individuals' profiles - especially when working with CxO, CVP, SVP, VP, Board members, and business owners. The higher you go in the enterprise world or on the management/ownership ladder, the more important this approach becomes.



## Champion maturity training scale

- **Learn to do your job** – from first steps to unconscious proficiency.
- **Get your own voice** – understand who you are, what your strengths are, help others to learn and become proficient at their job.
- **Give others a voice** – teach others how to help people find their voices, become role models, and forget about yourself. You are already there. External recognition or validation is not important. How you feel about who you are is very important. External recognition will eventually follow the confidence and inner tranquility of internal recognition, of your self-esteem. But that should not be your goal. Wanna be great? Just be it.
- **Kill a dragon** – a dragon is a mix of your personality traits that prevent you from using a Force like Master Yoda. You already have a voice, you gave voices to many people, and they have given voices to many second-line followers. Yet you are still there, a Jedi, and not yet a Master. That's why you want to kill a dragon. Most traditional "dragons" are: lack of taking credit themselves or giving recognition to others, not closing loops, feeling an excessive need to be "me" – i.e. I am who I am and will not change, and feeling an excessive need to always be the smartest guy on the block.
- **Influence by absence** – when your job is done well, everything works without you the same way as with your presence and participation. That is the ideal transition point out of the mission. When you can be absent on the scene that is a zone of your strongest influence, because you cannot be argued with, and therefore, you cannot lose a battle. Your image and will is in the minds and hearts of those left to sustain the mission. Your influence by absence lasts in this most powerful state until those people left with your imprint are still there and remember you in their minds and hearts.

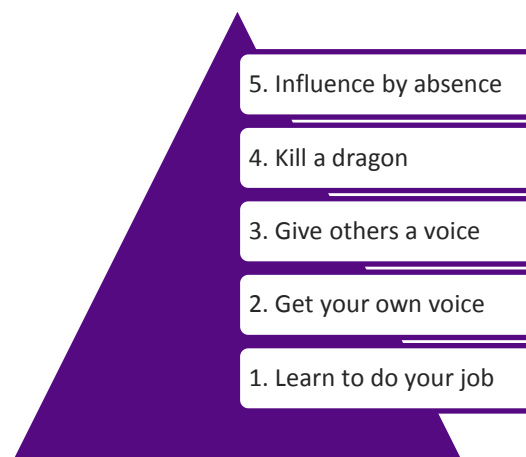


Figure 1. Champion maturity training scale

## Leadership in “Championship”

When faced with a problem as a team member, “top talent” intuitively knows the appropriate time to step in or step back; s/he focuses on the project’s success, not on a rigid leadership structure. We mentioned this concept in section “Crashing traditional hierarchy”.

Great leaders tend to be inclusive, humble, self-directed and mission focused and inspire others to action. A champion who exhibits leadership ability is generally well respected by co-workers. They have demonstrated competence and are often known to seek feedback (both positive and negative). Top talent shows genuine concern for the well-being of the group.

“Top talent” NEVER says:

“It’s not my job!”

Or

“This question is beyond my pay grade!”

But “top talent” might say:

“If I create this slide, it probably may become the most popular slide in a company!”

Companies are ready to hire and retain top talent. Though the hard skills may vary from one firm to the next, the soft skills, which define traits for top talent, are universal: adaptability, collaboration, problem solving, humility, and leadership.

The primary goal for all hires should be to learn everything necessary to excel at your job and to exceed your supervisors’ expectations. In order to do this well, you need to understand what’s expected of you and your boss, and often your boss’s boss. Becoming a Champion requires more than using your expertise to do an adequate job at work. It necessitates using your talents, creativity and expertise to advance the success of your team and your company.

## Lead, coach, and accept an individual profile

Listed below are the tips for managers and management consultants who work with champion material. I will not go over the concepts of human/team/brand profiling and psychology here, as this is not the goal of this report. What I do intend to articulate here is that there is a useful sequence of approaches that works for any champion material (individual, team or strategic business unit, or company/brand).

1. Look around and promote informal leaders, regardless of their title.

2. Never punish for weaknesses, especially avoid any serious feedback in public.
3. Reputation, reputation, reputation – it is a guiding star.
4. Capitalize on strengths. Yes, especially because they are likely off the chart extraordinary.
5. Set motion towards stretch goals by calling out needs and praising for what has been achieved in the areas of development, and (importantly) praise for something that has not yet been done (praise should outpace achievement).
6. Consolidate the champion's voice, assure consistent voice.
7. Do not have them over message. Humility, modesty comes across stronger. The less they say, the bigger they are in the stakeholders' imagination.
8. Create situations to reiterate and stabilize their voice among stakeholders.
9. Encourage stakeholders to repeat and broadcast a champion's message.
10. Position your champion to help others find and broadcast their own voices.
11. Challenge your champion to kill his/her inner dragons.
12. Prepare champions to influence by absence.

You see, if you apply the above approaches as described, your management consulting assignments are resolved almost automatically, because the nature of assignments themselves is as easy as hardwiring with the proper tools.

## Management consulting per se

There are a few hundreds management concepts out there (you can find them in books). We select a few dozen that you find most relevant to your client's case, apply them, see if they work. If they don't, we simply change assumptions (and hopefully budget), and repeat. Eventually things work out towards the set objectives, or we have gathered proof that our client hit a dead end and needs to fail fast, quickly turn on the hills, and march in a new direction.

If you are somebody with a problem and a budget, look for a company like Copernici whose team will not only be a staffing or problem solving resource for you bridging your immediate business gaps and hardwiring, but who is skilled to identifying and developing a champion in you, your direct report, your team, or your organization. Someone who will have your back and supply candid feedback behind closed doors is a relatively cheap price to pay for your "brand".

And hey, leaving behind a few well respected, highly regarded, and motivated-to-do-more Champions is the ultimate reward for a team of management consultants.

Request to be contacted if you would like to discuss this topic more: [Liana@Copernici.com](mailto:Liana@Copernici.com). Put "**Champion material**" in the subject line.

The information contained in this document represents Copernici's current views on the issues discussed. Because of ever changing market conditions, it should not be interpreted to be an ongoing commitment on a part of Copernici, and Copernici cannot guarantee the accuracy of any information presented after the date of publication.

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