



# The 15 Causes of Underperformance

Hugh Blane, CEO, Claris Consulting, LLC

Every six to eight weeks I facilitate a meeting of mentors and mentees at [The Rainer Club](#). By attending these meetings, mentees gain greater insight as to how they can benefit from participating in the program, and mentors can learn how to become more effective. It's always an engaging and fun time and frankly, I learn a tremendous amount from listening to what people have to say.

## **Hugh's Bold Statement:**

In order to facilitate learning and growth within others you have to first facilitate learning and growth within yourself.

Here's what I mean. Last night I had an agenda I thought was just right, but after starting the evening by asking the question "what do you see as the reasons for underperformance," the group's responses led me to a better agenda because I learned in the moment from the conversation that ensued.

While I asked the question specifically about underperformance at work, I realized the causes of underperformance listed by the group applied to the mentoring program also. It turned out that what would be most powerful at that time would be to have the mentors discuss with their mentees what causes of underperformance were impacting them in their mentoring relationship. What transpired was a real world, real time conversation that led to powerful new insights and specific action plans for accelerated growth.

## **What you need to know:**

Yes, you need an agenda for team meetings and yes; you need a plan and a strategy for where your leadership, team and organization are going. But there are an equal number of times you need to toss the agenda out the window and be in the moment. I wrote about this in my book: *7 Principles of Transformational Leadership: Create a Mindset of Passion, Innovation and Growth*, it is equally if not more important for



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leaders to be continual learners. It is not possible to create a learning, growing and flourishing organization if the leader is stuck in thinking the same way they always have. Being a continual learner requires three strategies:

## 1. Stop trying to be a know it all

Too often leaders are under the erroneous impression that they need to have all the answers. The notion is that if they can know the answers they will decrease the time to success. That's true in that it increases expedience, but it also reduces an employees learning and growth.

Learning and growth requires wrestling with not having all the answers so new information is sought out and new perspectives are considered. Leaders who want a learning organization that is committed to flourishing employees act as a mentor to each employee and cultivate what I call 4<sup>th</sup> Dimension Thinking. This involves thinking four steps ahead of where an employee is today.

## 2. Consider the alternatives

The ability for employees to look at issues from multiple perspectives, objectively consider the available information, and make informed decisions about what to do next is in short supply. Oftentimes it's because people are over scheduled, overworked and overwhelmed, but it is also oftentimes because employees don't know how to do so.

When there is no process for considering the alternatives, the leader must step into the breach and teach employees how to do so. A simple question leaders can ask is: What **information** do you have, what **insights** can you glean from the information at hand, what is the **impact** your insights will have on the team or organization, and what do you recommend we **implement**? This 4-I process is a powerful process for thinking critically.



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### 3. Be genuinely curious

Curiosity is vital for a learning organization. Without curiosity we rely heavily on what we've always known and believed and resist stretching our thinking with new perspectives. My mother once admonished me to read three different perspective of an issue before opening my mouth.

She said I should read a proponent's perspective, an opponent's and a neutral third party. In my teens and twenties I did so out of obligation and because I was adhering to a recommendation from a powerful and well-read woman but without much curiosity.

Now I'm genuinely curious about why people hold the views they do. As my maturation process has deepened I'm less inclined to see people as ill informed, naive or lazy for their views. I see their views as rooted in the life experiences and mentors who shaped their thinking. It's only after understanding a person's backstory can I engage in a respectful and meaningful conversation.

#### **Hugh's Leadership Challenge:**

Review the fifteen causes of underperformance listed on the next page and identify two or three that are impacting you and your team. At your next team meeting, discuss what strategies you can implement to address them. By doing so you'll send a clear message about underperformance no longer being tolerated and become a role model for learning and growth.



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1. Confusion over values
2. No accountability
3. Bad metrics
4. Measuring the wrong things
5. Bad bosses
6. Fear of failure
7. Regulations
8. Lack of focus
9. Conflicting priorities
10. Negative mindset
11. Poor skillset
12. Poor organizational structure
13. Complacency
14. Not recognizing high performance
15. Valuing money more than people

Hugh Blane is President of Claris Consulting. He is a nationally recognized business strategist hired to help organizations solve challenging business issues, strengthen personal and professional relationships, and execute on strategic initiatives with greater effectiveness. A subject-matter expert in leadership, strategy, execution, talent and mindset, Hugh Blane is a senior-level consultant who has worked with thousands of people in a wide variety of organizations including Sony Pictures, Pepperdine and Stanford University, Microsoft, Starbucks, Spacelabs Medical, KPMG and Costco.