BUSINESS MANAGER PROFESSION

When success blinds you

Frédéric Le Pennec · 7 May 2025

Success can foster an illusion of mastery that blinds business managers to the true causes of their results. To endure, one must analyze their victories with lucidity, remain humble, and continue to learn.

The Illusion of Mastery

Success has an intoxicating flavor. It gives you the impression that everything you touch turns to gold, that your decisions are necessarily the right ones, and that you have finally unlocked the secret of the trade. This feeling of mastery, almost euphoric, is unfortunately one of the greatest illusions a professional – and particularly a Business Manager in a consulting firm – can succumb to.

This phenomenon is largely explained by a cognitive bias known as the **illusion of control**. When success is achieved, many people attribute all the credit to themselves. They sometimes forget that other factors played a role: a favorable economic context, a strong team, an opportunity that presented itself at the right time, or simply a stroke of luck.

Take the example of a Business Manager who, in less than a year, manages to sign several major contracts with new clients. He tells himself that his prospecting method is the best, that his commercial approach is unbeatable, and that he doesn't need to question himself. Yet, upon closer inspection, we discover that one of the contracts was influenced by a former colleague who became a decision-maker at the client, that another was facilitated by a project emergency that greatly reduced competition, and that the market dynamics were generally very favorable at that time. Believing that these victories result solely from his commercial brilliance would be a mistake.

When the Storm Comes

The real problem arises when the winds change. Because success, if not analyzed with clarity, lulls vigilance. Those who think their methods are infallible are far less inclined to question them, to learn, or to anticipate risks. It's a bit like a sailor who, after navigating calm seas, thinks he no longer needs to check his equipment or consult the weather. And when the storm arrives, it's too late to regret his overconfidence.

Another striking example concerns leaders of small consulting firms that have experienced rapid strong growth. In just a few years, they recruit left and right, multiply client references, and imagine that this dynamic is the natural consequence of their visionary management. Yet often, this growth relies on a buoyant market and talents they have not always managed to retain. When the market slows or consultants start leaving, these leaders find themselves at a loss, unable to question what had worked so well until then.

Methods that Become Traps

It is crucial to understand that **success is a sneaky trap**: it reinforces the belief that what worked yesterday will work tomorrow, without considering that the context is constantly changing. An action relevant in a given environment may become obsolete in another.

A Business Manager sending hundreds of profiles in bulk to prospects may have a positive response in times of skill shortage. But if the market turns, the same method becomes counterproductive, even damaging to his image. What was seen as proactivity quickly turns into perceived commercial harassment, difficult to rectify afterward.

Stay Humble in the Face of Success

To avoid falling into this trap, it is essential to cultivate a permanent posture of humility. This doesn't mean doubting oneself at every moment or punishing oneself after every success. But it involves getting into the habit, after each victory, of asking the following question: **"What were really the causes of this success? What depended on me, and what was beyond my control?"** A simple, yet healthy reflex.

This is also why some great professionals, in all sectors, remain always on the lookout, even at the peak of their careers. They continue to learn, to listen, to surround themselves with people capable of telling them what they don’t want to hear. Steve Jobs, for example, despite his genius aura, surrounded himself with a team capable of challenging him precisely because he knew that success was never definitively acquired.

The True Measure of Success

In short, believing you are good because you have succeeded is like believing you are invincible because you have won a fight. It's not the victory that makes you invincible, but your ability to understand why you won – and to prepare for the day when circumstances will be less favorable.

True mastery is not measured in the ease of prosperous times, but in the ability to keep progressing, even when everything seems to be going well. Because that's where, quietly, the successes of tomorrow are prepared... or the crushing failures for those who will have believed they became invincible.

frederic.lepennec@coact.fr · +33 6 03 06 05 02 · coact.fr

"Success is a bad teacher. It seduces smart people into thinking they can't lose."

Bill Gates

frederic.lepennec@coact.fr · +33 6 03 06 05 02 · coact.fr