



LayerOne '09: Diplomatic Security Consulting

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The Talk:

- A “lessons learned” from >10 years engineering, consulting, operations, and architecture.
- Supporting data based on a 360 review of my performance over a 5yr period as an infrastructure architect.
- Targeted at people who excel with technology and problem solving.
- Evolved from my own failures.
- Really intended to facilitate smart security people to be successful in consulting.



Why would anyone want to be a security consultant?

- Great opportunity to see what works and what doesn't work across a large number of environments.
- Very goal oriented and project focused.
- You don't have to deal with the *same* bullshit for long periods.
- Great for people who have skills across multiple disciplines.

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Why not be a security consultant?

- Establishing influence in an organization can be difficult or extremely difficult.
- People are usually guarded or defensive of the status quo.
- Requires a lot social and political awareness.
- You can't wear jeans nearly enough.

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Me (from '08 360 review):

2 Bosses

5 Reports

3 Peers

2 Customers

“Kevin is very technical, and sometimes that will get in the way of his answering a question and getting action from higher-ups.”

Skill	Rank
Intellectual Horesepower	1
Functional / Technical Skills	2
Problem Solving	3
Strategic Agility	4
Creativity	5
Timely Decision Making	6
Standing Alone	7
Command Skills	8
Process Management	9
Self-Development	10
Presentation Skills	11
Managing and Measuring Work	12
Priority Setting	13
Integrity and Trust	14
Drive for Results	15
Perseverance	16
Comfort Around Higher Management	17
Organizing	18
Dealing with Ambiguity	19
Perspective	20
Conflict Management	21
Listening	22
Time Management	23
Action Oriented	24
Motivating Others	25
Customer Focus	26

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Where did I go wrong?

“Extremely talented and knowledgeable.”

“Technical skills alone would be a Towering Strength.”

“Kevin’s technical skills are in no way narrow; he has significant breadth and depth in many technical topics.”

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Oh.. Here it is:

- “lets his nuts and bolts skill get in the way of his personal and business persona.”
- “As a leader, I would rate him as being narrow, because he focuses so much of his time on the technical...”
- “.. Sometimes he makes people feel inferior to his mental skills.”
- “He needs to be careful not to intimidate others who are not at the same level.”
- “While Kevin is often right, he is not going to get buy-in from others without approaching them a different way.”

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Influence doesn't come from being right.

- Consulting is all about establishing influence quickly within an organization.
- Being accurate and technically adept doesn't get you very far alone.
- Business leaders won't trust you until they believe you understand that business is the driver for all decisions.

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How can we establish influence?

- State problems with respect to the fundamental business and economic impacts as part of project definition.
- Demonstrate that you understand that problems evolve from more than just bad decisions and stupidity.
- Always approach issues with an ability to execute on the solution, use the observed problems as supporting evidence for the solution.
- Understand how you were engaged, and leverage that.
- Look out for organizational gaps that you can help bridge as an outsider.
- Look for easy tactical wins too!



Showstoppers on influence.

- Perceived arrogance.
- Actual arrogance 😊
- Not listening, not seeking out input (vacuum consulting).
- Saying things like “you don’t understand,” or “you’re wrong.”
- Getting frustrated.
- Saying something is “policy” (especially when it isn’t!)
- Getting too focused on the problems vs. the solutions.



Other Notes

- The same skills that got me to one level in a career, turned into show stoppers for me later.
- Your influence is based on how other people perceive you. So getting that feedback is critical to improving your ability to influence.
- It's easier for us to develop the soft skills, then it is for others to become technical experts.
- You don't need to be perfect, you do need to be reflective.
- If you can't make progress, you won't be happy.



Is it working for me?

- Unfortunately I wasn't able to repeat the same '360 after reflecting/adopting the principles of this doc.
- But yes, 6months after the review I had already received extremely positive feedback from many of the same people who reviewed me.
- I've had much greater success actually influencing decisions and organizations.

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