

# Assessments, Coaching Offset Leader Stress

Debra Cannarella, High Performing Systems, Inc.



Debra Cannarella  
Director of Operations



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After successfully bringing two small projects to completion in her organization, Sharon was asked to take on two new, larger projects. Sharon is normally a communicative team leader who provides frequent updates and information to her colleagues. Lately, however, she had begun withdrawing from team interactions and not keeping colleagues in the loop on project updates and changes.

When a team member who is also a trusted friend asked Sharon about the recent change in behavior, Sharon admitted she was overwhelmed by the increased project load, and her stress level was starting to get the best of her. Her response had been to try to handle the extra work all on her own, so she was spending extra time at work while still falling behind schedule on her projects. The stress was beginning to turn into a vicious downward spiral, and Sharon’s health and well-being began to suffer. Sharon’s colleague recommended working with an executive coach from High Performing Systems, Inc. (HPS), to get her situation turned around.

## A Closer Look

Upon further exploration with her HPS coach, Sharon discovered that the *number* of projects and to-do items was not the issue. The challenge came from the increased *visibility and scope* of the new projects. Her new projects represented a significant increase in the level of complexity she was asked to lead. Sharon realized the projects were too large and complex to manage the way she had always done in the past. Although she is extremely bright and very experienced in her industry, the complexity of the new projects was too much for Sharon to handle.

Rather than continuing to struggle and remain stressed, Sharon worked with

her coach to establish a plan. She completed the [Leadership Potential Equation](#), which identifies a leader’s Cognitive Ability, among other things. Cognitive Ability refers to how a leader processes, organizes, stores and retrieves information. It impacts the way a leader *creates the world she lives in*, makes sense of it and acts on it. A facet within Cognitive Ability is Complexity, and this was an area where Sharon was not using her full potential. She had never had the opportunity to work on such a complex project before, let alone two at the same time. She had the ability, but she didn’t have the experience or skills to put her ability to use.

As part of her pre-assessment with the coach, Sharon also completed the [EQ-i 2.0](#), a scientifically-validated measurement of Emotional Intelligence. The EQ-i revealed a high score in Independence: Sharon prides herself on being self-reliant in decision making, not wanting to lean on others or ask for help. (Even though she’s relatively collaborative/communicative, she makes decisions on her own.)

## The Plan

Sharon’s coach worked with her to create a two-pronged approach. The first step was designed to deal directly with the projects. Sharon found a way to break the projects into smaller pieces. This helped her address the level of complexity by making the projects more manageable. She set shorter goals that she could track and follow easily. As she progressed into her project timeline, she grew more comfortable applying her potential in Complexity.

The second part of Sharon’s plan required her to use her resources better. Even though she was the leader on the project, she was reluctant to assign tasks to her team members or

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get input from others on key decisions. She wanted to do all the work on her own. As she became more comfortable seeking out subject matter experts for their insights, she began to feel her stress level decrease. She started assigning tasks to other people and scheduling regular meetings to allow the team to contribute to decision making. She got her workload back to a manageable level, and her team members were able to contribute more fully, further enhancing their own development as well.

athletes see the need and benefit of working with a coach, business leaders should also consider professional coaching for development and performance management.

Assessments provide a baseline and critical insight about leaders. Using assessments like the Leadership Potential Equation and the EQ-i helped Sharon diagnose potential trouble spots and areas of unused potential. Once she and her coach understood their starting point, the creation of a targeted development plan was easier.

### Lessons Learned

Sharon’s colleague provided feedback to Sharon to help identify the need to get the coaching process started. From a work perspective, having colleagues support each other is an important factor in team success. By using empathy and support to increase Sharon’s awareness, the colleague played a crucial role in reducing Sharon’s overall stress and increasing the success of the project.

Sharon’s plan focused not only on using her potential but also on being careful not to over-use areas that could be too high. Learning how to leverage potential will maximize what leaders are able to contribute to an organization. It’s equally important to remember that any skill can be over-used and become a challenge. In Sharon’s case, trying to be too independent was hindering overall team performance. She found the right balance of using more complexity and less independence.

Sharon needed a coach. She tried too long and too hard to solve all her challenges on her own. Even elite athletes at the top of their professional careers realize the value of having a trusted team of coaches to raise their performance to the next level. If professional

Helping leaders achieve higher performance through assessment feedback and coaching maximizes their contribution and better aligns them within their organization’s talent management initiatives.

### About the Author

Debra Cannarella is the Director of Operations at High Performing Systems, Inc. (HPS), a consulting company that provides assessments, consulting and training solutions to help organizations excel. HPS conducts assessments of leadership potential and provides individual, leader and executive coaching to clients.

Contact Debra by email at [debra@hpsys.com](mailto:debra@hpsys.com).



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