

# RocknRolla

**CHARLES BARLOW and JANE CLARKE address the star in you – but warn you to remember the rest of the band**

**STARS SHINE IN** every sector of the economic firmament, but nowhere more so than in the hedge fund industry, a galaxy of twinkling talent. Why? Because this is a place where people stand or fall on their own performance, where individual judgment is critical, where time is of the essence and where creative genius is encouraged, celebrated and vital: all factors which mitigate against the cult of the team and where ‘good’ corporate behaviour can be seen as an impediment to excellence. Starlets confess they’d kill to acquire real stellar status – so the role models are created – and with them comes the indulgence of behaviours that elsewhere would lead to an early exit.

To be clear, this is not about the population who achieve stellar performance, thereby keeping their investors’ fund alive. Our focus is on that subset who use their level of success to justify red card behaviour. Behaviour like breaking a commitment to consult, treating others’ contributions as trivial, putting people down and assuming a God-given right to do whatever they please. The rock stars!

So, be honest: does this sound like you? How would you know? Well, if you find yourself thinking things like, “What would they know?” or “I’m surrounded by idiots,” or even, “this place only exists because of me,” then you may be well on your way to rock stardom.

But does it matter? Stars are often loners, but this doesn’t mean you enjoy loneliness. You require fuel; you run on praise and recognition from those whom you respect. You want to be consulted on any significant change of direction. And, as Boris Groysberg and Linda-Eling Lee’s 2007 Harvard research on managing top performers showed, stars

can’t operate without a support team and you’d be wise to remember this. So it’s important to behave in a way that encourages the support of those around you, rather than alienating them.

Rock stars are notorious for limited attention spans, which intimidates others. To counter this, it’s vital to listen actively, ask open questions and be open-minded.

This will make it more likely you’ll get the best ideas and honest positions out of others. Try to recognise the support network that you currently enjoy. Be appreciative.

Then there’s the question of bad behaviour and violent outbursts. What can you do to modify your reaction to what feels like the idiotic behaviour of others? Empathise: put yourself into the other person’s shoes and work out

where they’re coming from, and how you’d feel if the positions were reversed and someone had said that to you. More easily said than done, but if you can master this art, the benefits will repay themselves many times over.

Recognise your gravitational pull – your ability to suck in lesser bodies. Turn this to advantage by coaching and mentoring embryonic stars, transforming them into a resource rather than a drain on your precious time. But beware of your tendency to intimidate and ensure that it’s new habits you’re teaching – not rock star tantrums.

And above all remember that stars can fall too; it is a symptom of stardom to deny this. So if you do fall into this category, you must learn to recognise the early indications of stellar decline and be ready to take action to avoid degenerating into red dwarfs or imploding into black holes. **H**

*The authors are consultants at business psychologists Nicholson McBride 020 7432 8460; nicholson-mcbride.com*

