



NICHOLAS FOSTER

Why  
You've Hit  
Your  
Career Ceiling

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# You're Stuck in the Weeds

*“Strategic leaders must not get consumed by the operational and tactical side of their work. They have a duty to find time to shape the future.”*

*Stephanie S. Mead*

You work hard, get results and have a track record of successful delivery.

Day in day out, you're in the details, solving problems and overcoming issues. Nothing gets in your way of the next release.

People recognise you as an expert in execution and are keen to give you more or work with you. Why wouldn't they?

Clients love what you do and don't want to deal with anyone else due to the impact you have on their business.

But will that get you to the senior level?

It's definitely a great step. But in my experience, it is unlikely you will get promoted, and if you do, it won't be for long before you fail or burn out.

But deep down, you know this. You know the high demands and expectations at the senior level, and you will struggle to meet these if you don't scale up by changing your ways of working.

But something is keeping you in the weeds. An opposing force so strong that it's stopping you from

achieving what you really want for yourself and your loved ones.

Maybe it's because:

- You're reluctant to move away from your comfort zone where you are an expert and highly marketable to a zone where you need to grow and develop.
- You like being the hero, the go-to person who solves the clients' problems and gets the deliveries over the line.
- You feel you will lose control, and deliveries will slip.

- You think it's just easier to do it yourself, or you just don't have the time to mentor others.
- You are in a hurry, or others require you to know everything in minute detail when they ask.

Or maybe it's something else.

Whatever it is, if you don't overcome it, you will struggle to reach and thrive at the senior level.

Let me share a story with you about Jai, whose opposing force was fear. A fear so strong that it almost ruined his career and his relationships with his family.

## Jai's Story

Jai is a dedicated family man with a beautiful wife and two young children who are the apple of his eye.

He is highly driven and works hard to succeed but always spends evenings and weekends with his family. The only time he will compromise on this is if there is a work emergency.

He works for a company experiencing accelerated growth, which means plenty of exciting opportunities for ambitious high performers.

Under his leadership, his current area of responsibility is outperforming the others. If he continues to perform like this and take on more

responsibility, he will be up for a promotion next year.

Jai is beyond happy. He has a challenging, well-paid job which he loves and a great relationship with his young family. Life couldn't be better.

One morning in September, Jai's boss, Ian, stopped by his desk and asked him to come into his office.

Ian shut the door behind Jai as he entered so they could talk privately. Jai sat down in the chair opposite his boss's desk, his back was straight, and he was focused intently on what his boss was about to say.

Ian sat down in his seat with his elbows and forearms resting on his desk and his hands crossed. He then started to talk.

"Jai, you have done an amazing job in your area. The clients have nothing but praise for the work you and your team have done for them. With that in mind, I would like to offer you some additional responsibility."

"I would like you to take over another area where we are struggling to deliver and get the clients back on our side. With your track record, I am sure you can turn this area around."

"What do you say?"



Jai was thrilled. This additional responsibility would give him the platform he needed for promotion.

"Ian, I appreciate the opportunity; I won't let you down" replied Jai.

Jai and Ian both smiled, stood up and shook hands. A definite and firm handshake. The type you see in a movie when two businessmen agree on a lifetime deal.

Jai went home that night excited to tell his wife about his new opportunity. His wife is delighted that he is being recognised for all his hard work.

Over the next few weeks, Jai started to compromise on getting home before his children went to bed. Initially, it was one night a week, then two and then

every workday. He even started to bring work home at the weekend.

He was tired, stressed, and his tolerance levels were so low that he started to snap at his colleagues, children and argue with his wife. His relationships at work and home became stretched.

It was the same at work. There was a constant conflict with his new clients, and Jai's old clients that once sang his praise were now complaining as they no longer got any attention from Jai or his team.

Jai also ran around the office like this hair was on fire, which his boss and other executive leaders observed. They started to think about whether Jai would survive at the senior level.

Jai is an intelligent guy, he knew he had to change his ways of working, but he isn't doing it. Something is holding him back. Something internal that is causing him to fail at work and home.

In Jai's case, it is a fear of letting go of the detail and control.

Jai must find a way to gradually delegate to others in his team to build up trust and finally let go of control. Thus, allowing others to grow under his leadership and freeing up bandwidth to focus on what he should be doing.

He also must understand that he no longer needs to know all the answers but can refer to his subject matter experts when required in meetings or

presentations, allowing others in his team to raise their profile.

Letting go of the details and control is a risk for Jai, but one he must undertake in a way that makes him comfortable to succeed in the long run.

The good news is that Jai decided to change his ways of working, built a small leadership team he could delegate to and let go of the detail.

After six months of Jai focusing on overcoming his fears, rebuilding the relationships with his clients and coaching his team to fill the gaps that he needs to leave behind, he starts to regain the confidence of his clients and career stakeholders.

But more importantly, he is getting home before his children's bedtime and has regained his extraordinary relationship with his family.

After another year of demonstrating to his career stakeholders that he can meet the expectations and demands required at the senior level, he got his promotion.

## What About You?

That's enough about Jai. What about you?

If you are up for a coaching challenge, then I have one that focuses on you.

I'd like you to reflect back over the last week. What percentage of your working week did you spend in the details, on problems and talking about or dealing with dramas?

If that figure is above 30%, then I would say this was too high.

What kept you in the weeds? What are your opposing forces?

Your challenge is to create a 14-day action plan to reduce the impact of one of these opposing forces.

You in?

You are, then what's going to stop you from following through on these actions?

Who can you share the plan with who will hold you accountable?

If you cannot find someone, email it to me, and I will follow up in 2 weeks to make sure you've got it done.

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