

If you lie down with clones you will stagnate your career

*We have a tendency to surround ourselves with and ask advice from people just like ourselves, putting us at risk of confirmation bias. When we want personal growth, **Grace Lordan** writes that we must think again about who we spend our time with or seek advice from. One of the easiest ways to grow quickly is to get feedback from people with diverse backgrounds and life experiences.*

Who are your influencers? Who do you go to for advice about your career goals? Grab a piece of paper and write down who they are. Write next to each name the following information about each person: gender, age, race, country of birth and where they were educated. If you do not know exactly, give it your best guess. Do they all share a lot of similar characteristics? If so, you may have been bitten by stereotype bias. You may have a certain (false) belief about who can help you move ahead in your journey, and it is causing you to seek out interactions that align with this stereotype of what a 'good' person looks like. Some common stereotypes link entrepreneurship to masculine traits, technological savviness to youth, and occupations involving care to women.

The people on your influencer list may also have an awful lot of similarities to you. Write down any observable characteristics about you that you view as major parts of your identity, and compare them to those of the people on your list.

Maybe the characteristics are clones of your own? Do you notice similarity bias? This is our tendency to surround ourselves with people just like ourselves. We like our own company very much, and want to replicate it over and over again. These folk tend to have similar viewpoints to us, making it much easier for us to confirm our ideas as brilliant – in other words, to be affected by confirmation bias. While a group of similar people may challenge you, they will all challenge you in roughly the same way. This may work out well if your group has power and can hire you for the activities you want to be doing. However, assuming the career journey you want to take is about personal growth, I encourage you to think again about who you spend your time with or seek advice from. One of the easiest ways to grow quickly is to get feedback from people with diverse backgrounds and life experiences.

Why? Different types of thinkers give you different types of advice. If you are setting up a business, do you only want one type of customer? If you are designing a product, have you thought about how women's needs are different to men's?

If you are writing an article, do you want it to be read only by people in their twenties – or older people, too? If you are advancing in your firm, do you want to be supported by only one type of colleague?

Whatever you are doing, your mind should be as open as possible to all opportunities. There is an intuitive reason why diverse teams are better problem-solvers, better at predicting the future, and more innovative. Their members have lived different lives, pursued different skill sets, and each of them has a different stock of knowledge. They do not all think the same way. They do not all repeat the same ideas. As a result, they can get to the front much quicker than teams with only one type of background, skill set or knowledge base. Combat similarity and confirmation biases by reassessing the people that you have chosen as your influencers. If need be, make some changes so that the viewpoints you hear are different to your own– and to each other– giving you a higher probability of success.

The best managers I have observed are always willing to hire people that are better than themselves. There are two reasons why this is a great idea. First, the average productivity of the team is mechanically raised. Second, having a colleague that performs better than you raises your own game. However, lots of managers would not make this call. Why? Ego causes them to want to be around people who have similar or lower levels of performance to themselves.

When choosing influencers, do not fall into the ego trap. Remember that you are on a learning curve, and to acquire the expertise that you need it can be helpful to be around people who have far greater knowledge and perform much better than you do.

Think about the influencers you expose yourself to. There are two reasons why it is important to do this. First, the people you surround yourself with will hopefully be sharing their knowledge with you, so it is important that you seek out those of a higher ability or who know different things than you do. Don't worry too much about being the smartest person in the room. If you are, it probably means you're not advancing much.

Second, you are likely to mimic the behaviour of those around you without realizing it. The people you surround yourself with will expose you to new norms, and this can cause you to develop new habits.

There is a reason why children in school do better if put into classrooms with children who perform better than them. It's the same reason why people are more likely to regularly exercise if they are part of a group. And it's why we end up working later when we look around and see that our colleagues aren't rushing to go home. We like to follow in the footsteps of those around us. But most of the time we are not aware that we are following others – instead we think we are doing things for ourselves.

Identifying the helpful but also the unhelpful – social norms you surround yourself with is a useful exercise.

The people we expose ourselves to change our behaviour and skills without us even realizing. We are the product of those who we surround ourselves with. We mimic our networks and ingrain new habits as a result. Remember this when reflecting on the list of influencers you just made!



Notes:

- *This blog post is an excerpt from the author's book [Think Big: Take Small Steps and Build the Future You Want](#), Penguin Life.*
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