

Western Workplace Culture Rewards Cowboys

By Nick Tasler

In 1776, a group of ragtag renegades had the audacity to wage a military challenge against the mighty British Empire. They were outnumbered, out-trained, out-fed, and vastly out-spent. Yet these opportunity-obsessed colonials miraculously prevailed and emblazoned their mark on Western civilization.

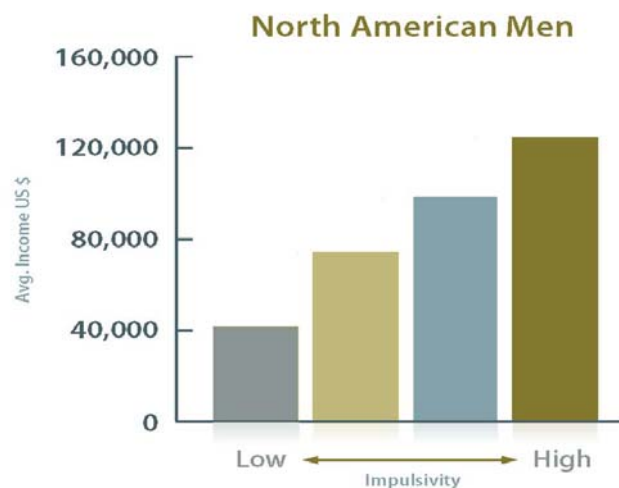
The so-called “cowboy cultures” found in many of today’s Western entrepreneurial enterprises are likely modern manifestations of the same revolutionary mentality that says to defy odds is not only courageous, but also leads down the path of success. But is there any real evidence to support the assumption that rebels and gamblers prosper?

Wild West

TalentSmart® research reveals the answer depends a lot on your gender and what part of the world you call “home.” Much of this renegade behavior is encompassed by the concept that psychologists label “impulsivity.” Impulsive people tend to make quick

decisions and subsequently pay less attention to the consequences of their actions. Instead, they allow the allure of potential reward drive their choices. In Wild West parlance, they tend to “shoot first and apologize later.”

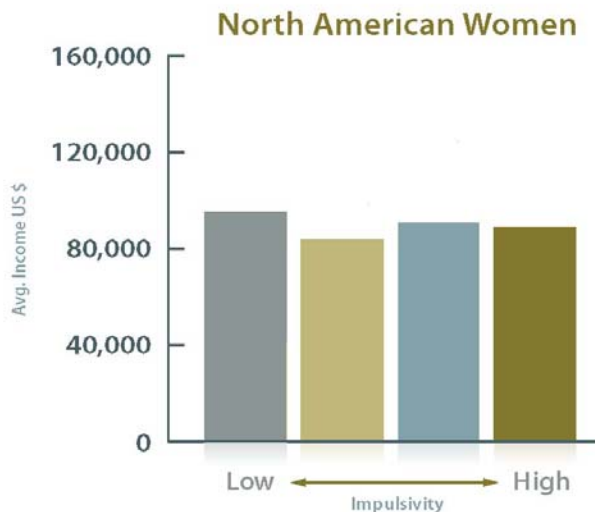
TalentSmart® researchers studied people from around the world, measured how impulsive they are and then compared that to their incomes and job performance. We found that the impulsive cowboys in Western societies are indeed rewarded for their quick-draw antics. They received higher job performance ratings and for North American men specifically, those ratings translated into significantly higher incomes.



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The New Double Standard

But *cowgirls* are another story. Women are virtually unaffected by impulsivity. It's not that women aren't impulsive; they just aren't rewarded or penalized for being impulsive. Impulsivity just doesn't matter.



To make sense of this peculiar result, it helps to take a look at the differences we *didn't* find between men and women. We *didn't* find a difference between the impulsivity scores of men and women in our samples, which means women were just as impulsive as men. Neither did we find a difference in average income between men and women. When we grouped people from both genders and

all geographical locations together, we also failed to find any overall connection between impulsivity and professional success.

That means the differences we discovered in Western men are due to cultural- and gender-specific expectations. In the West, men are expected to take bold actions, and the men who do so are often rewarded for it. They are perceived as daring and decisive—two traits that are not-so-distant cousins of impulsivity.

But Western men who fail to conform to traditional male expectations are finding it can be costly, literally. It is almost as though Western culture has created a new glass ceiling of sorts that stands between less brazen men, and high performance ratings and incomes. In order for Western men to get ahead, they seem to require solid skills *plus* a renegade mentality.

A healthy awareness of these implicit expectations should inform the way managers manage. Managers need to



whitepaper

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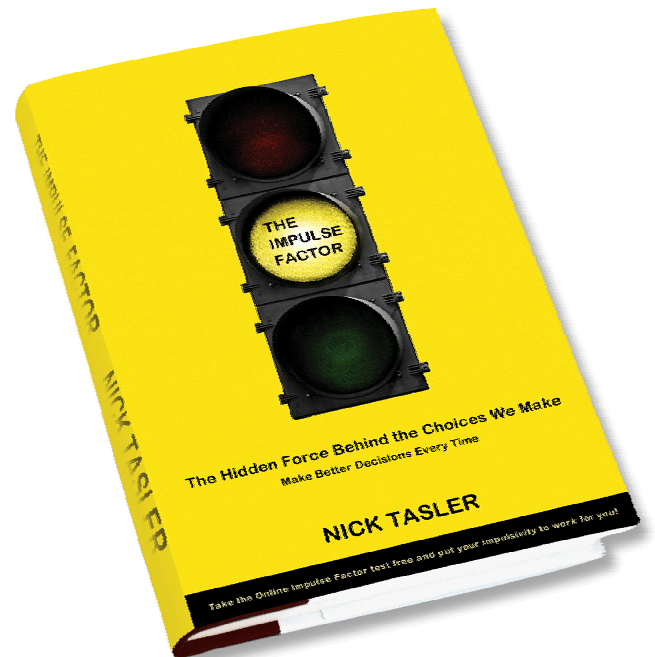
ask themselves how they reward the women and the men on their teams for taking chances. Are managers subconsciously sending mixed messages to employees that men are required to gamble, while women are neither expected nor encouraged to take the same risks?

It could be that some of the men you work with aren't cut out to be impulsive or some of the women are afraid you'll come down on them for taking risks and failing. Both the more and less impulsive styles have unique strengths that will prove valuable in helping your team succeed, so reward those strengths accordingly, and independently of gender.

The best way to find out whether you're guilty of applying a subconscious double standard is to get valid feedback from the people around you. The good news is that if you are setting different expectations for different genders, it is probably not because you are a closet sexist. Rather it is because you are the product of a strong cultural force. All it takes to change is a little awareness of

your own habits and the tendencies of the people on your team.

Take a deeper look at this and other fascinating new discoveries in Nick Tasler's new book *The Impulse Factor: Why Some of Us Play it Safe and Others Risk it All*. Learn about a 50,000 year old gene mutation that may be responsible for humanity's progress and domination, why caution is dangerous, the myth of the "risk-taker," why we order lobster when all we want is a club sandwich, and much more.



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Nick Tasler

Nick is the head of Research and Development at TalentSmart®, a think tank, consultancy, and leading provider of cutting-edge psychological assessments. He has studied and worked with hundreds of thousands of people from all walks of life, from corporate executives to cosmetology students. His skill at bridging the gap between complex concepts and simple solutions has directly benefited multinational corporations, including GE and Coca-Cola, as well as smaller, privately-owned enterprises and industries ranging from government to healthcare and pharmaceuticals to financial services.

Nick's new book, *The Impulse Factor* (Touchstone Fireside, in press) is set for release in the fall of 2008.