

Knowledge Judgment and Action Judgment

One of the most valuable and difficult to define attributes is judgment.

Knowing how to read and react to a situation, when to say/not say things, and other “soft”, social, and emotional intelligences. I’m not sure if judgment can be taught to someone who lacks it. Judgment can certainly get refined through experience, and someone who has it can gain highly specific forms based on contextual feedback.

I’ve been using the broad catch-all word “judgment” to describe this trait for a long time. Yesterday it occurred to me that judgment manifests in two very different ways. Or maybe it has two levels.

Level one is knowledge judgment. People who know the appropriate action to take in a given situation. This so rare and precious. People who get it often come with a proposed solution that perfectly fits the situation and navigates the nuance. They always propose the right solution or close to it, but they still *propose* a solution.

Level two is action judgment. These people know what action to take *and* they take it without asking or getting validation from others. They might ruffle feathers in an authoritarian structure by acting before asking, but in a more open and dynamic structure, they have far more upside than people only with level one judgment. An early stage startup, for example, will suffer if an employee always needs to get official approval for their proposed action, vs. someone who sees the need to act first and discuss later. Level two judgment is not just about knowing what actions to take and taking them, but knowing *when* acting without asking is in order and when further deliberation is warranted.

Of course, if you don’t have knowledge judgment at level one, the worst thing is to try to go level two and act without asking. That’s the worst. But if you are good at knowing how to read and react to a situation, the next step is knowing when to do so without double checking with someone else first.