

Strong leaders make a difference—for better or worse

Shortly after arriving at Adecco as their new vice president of business ethics & compliance, I was asked to talk about business ethics at an Adecco North American conference in Dallas, where the top 180 leaders from the region were assembled. After agreeing to speak at the conference, I received a template that all speakers were to use for their PowerPoint presentations. The tagline on the first slide—"Leaders make the difference"—was the conference theme.

Not surprisingly, many conference speakers made references to great leaders like Martin Luther King, Mother Teresa and Mahatma Gandhi. When my turn came, I caused a bit of stir when I flashed up on the screen photographs of other leaders who also made "the difference." These included Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin and Saddam Hussein.

I observed that all the individuals on my slides, including the tyrants, shared attributes vital to effective leadership. They were highly intelligent, charismatic, courageous and had a vision of what they wanted to achieve. During their lifetimes, they all made a profound difference in the lives of millions of people. But the kind of difference they each made varied substantially.

If you measure the success of a leader by the long-term well-being of those



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being lead, Martin Luther King, Mother Teresa and Mahatma Gandhi succeeded where Hitler, Stalin and Hussein failed. In our quest to be and to develop successful leaders, we must understand the reasons why.

I submit that, in general, those who succeed by this metric are "ethical leaders" while those who fail are not. Although ethical leaders are not invariably successful, experience has shown that leaders maximize their chances of success if they are worthy of being followed. Conversely, they minimize their chances of success if they are not. A detailed doctoral thesis on the subject could follow, but anyone who has had the misfortune of working for a selfish, dishonest jerk—even a selfish, dishonest jerk who is smart—understands that such tyrannical leaders are not just unpleasant, they are ineffective.

If we desire to apply lessons learned

from tyrants and jerks, it is important that we not confuse "ethical leaders" with "perfect" leaders. If you set the bar too high, no one will bother to jump. For example, it is not particularly helpful to reference extraordinary individuals like Gandhi, King and Mother Teresa as examples of model leadership because their personal sacrifice for a cause was greater than most could reasonably expect anyone to make for a profit-making enterprise. Instead, it is better to define ethical leaders as people who, albeit imperfectly, struggle every day to:

- Care more about the success and well being of their followers than themselves;
- Have the discipline and courage to live by a set of moral values;
- Lead by example rather than by intimidation; and
- Find the wisdom to strike a principled balance between justice and mercy, honesty and loyalty, individual and community, and short-term and long-term.

Improving ethical leadership skills in corporations at all levels isn't just a nice thing to do, it is essential. The factory worker who refuses to cut corners, even when the pressure is on for faster performance; the administrative assistant who chooses not to spread gossip that may disrupt office harmony; the middle

manager who has the courage to stand up for their subordinates and tell superiors when they are wrong; and the senior manager who admits mistakes and treats people with dignity and respect are all much more valuable to an organization than their unethical counterparts.

The challenge is crafting effective programs to successfully induce growth in employees' ethical leadership skills. There are no magic bullets that can accomplish this in one shot. Improving employees' ethical awareness, reasoning skills and integrity is a significant and never-ending challenge in any organization. But perhaps those who are tasked to implement such programs could start by sharing the lessons learned by the failures of tyrants and jerks in their efforts to help their leaders not just "make the difference," but "make the right difference" while at work.

Jim Nortz is Chief Compliance Officer for Carestream Health. He also is a former Board member of the Rochester Area Business Ethics Foundation (RABEF) and the Ethics and Compliance Officer Association (ECO). The opinions expressed in this article are his alone and may not reflect those of the RABEF, the ECOA or Carestream Health. Nortz can be reached at jimnortz@gmail.com.

Managers must deal directly with workers having an affair

"Two of my team members have been having an affair for a while now and one of them is married. They have been goofing off to a certain extent, taking long lunches, calling in sick on the same day, sitting next to each other in meetings. Some team members have had to field awkward calls from her husband. The whole situation has become a bit of a behind-the-scenes office joke. Both of them have lost respect among their colleagues, which makes it more difficult for them to work effectively within the team. I'm relatively new to the team leader role and find myself struggling with it. The team has been doing good work as a whole—but what do I say if any of them complain about having to do more because this couple is less engaged and sneaking away from time to time? Also, how do I raise this with the couple? I'm pretty sure they're going to deny the affair."



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and will continue to be," said Rosemary Haefner, chief human resources officer in a statement for CareerBuilder.

But what do workers really think about it? Amy Nicole Salvaggio, an assistant professor of psychology at the University of Tulsa, conducted a study of nearly 200 workers in a variety of work environments and found that most did not mind seeing a romance develop between two unmarried colleagues. They did, however, object when one or both co-workers were married to someone else and when the relationship was between a supervisor and a direct report, wrote Susan Heathfield, a human resources expert with The Balance Careers and SusanHeathfield.com.

Regardless of how workers in your office really feel about the situation, Heathfield urges you not to delay taking action in this.

"I'd not wait until a coworker complains," she said in an interview. "That makes you look ineffective as a boss. Since you are the responsible party who leads this team, you need to act proactively to address the problem since it is having an adverse impact on your workplace. Speak with each person separately, and you don't need to mention an affair or purported affair in the conversation. The affair is not your workplace issue. It is also an assumption."

Roy Cohen, a New York City executive coach and author of the book, "The Wall Street Professional's Survival Guide: Success Secrets of a Career Coach," agreed, saying that if the co-workers are MIA with some frequency, others in the

office will feel the extra burden.

"That is just not fair," he says. "And if the relationship breaks down, which is inevitable, the fallout could heighten tensions even further. Imagine the consequences when team members feel compelled to take sides."

Like Heathfield, Cohen suggested speaking to each of them privately.

"Do not accuse them of actions that are inappropriate. Simply suggest that rumors have circulated and you are concerned that these rumors may be both disruptive and untrue," he says. "Ask for feedback. Never accuse. Sometimes making people aware of the consequence of their actions is enough to discourage them from continuing to engage in these activities, and, if not, at least they may be less reckless in publicly exposing their behavior."

When you speak with each person separately, Heathfield suggests sticking with the facts.

"For example, 'Mary, when you and John sit next to each other at every meeting, giggle and exchange glances, it makes your co-workers feel uncomfortable. How would you suggest that the problem of uncomfortable co-workers best be addressed?'"

Hopefully, Mary will say that she will sit with other co-workers during meetings. Then ask her if she will agree to do that in the future, Heathfield says. "If she agrees, then you have something to call out her behavior on if she breaks her word in the future."

Likewise, if you're meeting with John, for example, you can bring up the topic of the long lunch hour that he takes with Mary.

"This inconveniences your co-workers in these ways (and be specific). How do you think this problem can be solved? Again, if his answer is acceptable, make an agreement," Heathfield says. "Use this approach to address each behavior that is problematic."

And take the same approach when you talk with Mary about the phone calls and let her know that she is "placing her co-workers in an unacceptable stressful situation when they have to field calls from her husband when he is expecting to talk with her at work and she is not there."

Would a formal, well-written policy make a difference? A Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM) survey in 2013 found that 42 percent of companies had developed formal written workplace romance policies. Nearly all of those policies prohibited romantic relationships between supervisors and staff members. Some 33 percent of organizations forbid romances between employees who report to the same supervisor and 12 percent won't allow employees in different departments to date, Heathfield wrote.

Those in the surveys who discouraged or forbade dating in the workplace cited issues with potential sexual harassment claims, retaliation, claims that a relationship was not consensual and lots more. They also worried about "rampant and disruptive gossip" and about losing valuable employees who would go elsewhere if the relationship ends, Heathfield says.

But the problem with policies is "nobody follows them," noted biological anthropologist and author Helen Fisher in an interview with *Harvard Business Review*. "The bottom line is that about 34 percent of singles actually do feel that the office is a place to meet people," she said.

But only 12 percent of organizations in the SHRM survey provided training to managers and supervisors on managing workplace romances, Heathfield wrote. "Supervisors need to understand the appropriate disciplinary actions they should take" if a romance derails or becomes sexual harassment.

Indeed, the situation changes a lot if the situation enters sexual harassment territory, says Sharon Stiller, partner with

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"One issue is that what may seem like a voluntary affair may not be (witness the 'me too' allegations), so it may be necessary to report this to HR just so they can limit any potential exposure," Stiller says.

Realistically, though, when this couple hears some more about what's going

on in the office, "they should want to take some action to improve or change their behavior," says Steve Modica, attorney and owner of Modica Law Firm in Rochester.

Managers at Work is a monthly column exploring the issues and challenges facing managers. Contact Kathleen Driscoll with questions or comments by phone at (585)249-9295 or by e-mail at kadriscoll@aol.com.

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