

LEADERSHIP LESSONS FOR THE

# WONDERFULLY AVERAGE CEO



Lead Like a  
Cockroach

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# BUSINESS IS JUST LIKE HIGH SCHOOL

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**M**eryl Streep once famously remarked in a commencement address to college students: “You have been told that real life is not like college, and you have been correctly informed. Real life is more like high school.”

Remember the important stuff you used to worry about in high school, such as where you sat, with whom you sat, what you wore and how confident you appeared when you tried to talk to girls? Now you’re 40 or 50 and a business executive, and guess what? Nothing changed! Oh, you probably don’t worry about acne anymore, but the rules of the lunchroom still prevail.

I help executives succeed, and some of that consists of technical skills such as strategic planning, organizational structure design and financial acumen. However, more of it involves “lunchroom” issues such as communicating clearly, deciding with whom and where you spend your time, learning to engage in healthy conflict, developing confidence, solving problems and determining how to do your homework without pulling all-nighters!

Sometimes the behavior that got you into trouble in high school, if directed appropriately, can actually be helpful in the work environment. Remember the brainiac kids from high school whom you were always jealous of? Many of them didn't learn the emotional intelligence skills or appropriate risk taking to succeed in executive suites and are crunching numbers in a cubicle. (The combination of IQ and EQ, however, is what took a few of them to positions of greatness — not always associated with a title.)

I worked with Paul Orfalea, the founder of Kinko's, for quite a few years. He would frequently say, "The A students work for the B students. The C students run the company, and the D students dedicate the buildings." (As a D student, he went on to dedicate a few buildings!) Like Steve Jobs of Apple, Paul was prone to bending reality, but the point of his story is sometimes true. High school behavior often carries the day. When you're 50 and running an organization, no one gives a hoot whether you remember the symbol for xenon on the periodic table. (I had to look it up ... it's XE.)

Some work by MIT and Harvard folks point out that there is real bottom line impact in getting your people to interact more frequently in the lunchroom. It turns out that the companies where people actually spend time together (yes, face-to-face) get better bottom-line results.

So put away your iPhone for a minute. Don't send that text. Don't update Facebook. Go find a human being to talk to in the lunchroom.





Have you built in time on a daily basis to wander the warehouse, manufacturing plant or cube farm?



# ARE YOU A TIGER OR A COCKROACH?

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**I**n the battle for longevity, the cockroach beats the tiger. Tigers, fierce as they might be, are on the endangered species list while cockroaches seem to be capable of withstanding a nuclear attack. (The MythBusters actually injected them with radioactive material—the cockroaches, not the tigers—and they lived!)

Charles Darwin said, “It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change.”

One of the fundamental decisions in business is when to change and adapt vs. when to stick to your guns. This is a tough question not only regarding the strategy of the business, but also individual behavior. There are times to be a cockroach and there are times to be a tiger.

A business must change as the market demands it. Ignore it and you will perish. Blockbuster and Tower Records both once roared like a tiger but went out with a whimper. Many publishers, retailers and perhaps Dell Computer are on the same path.

On an individual level, I believe that strong leaders are neces-

sary, but that acting like a big cat with claws out all of the time will shorten your longevity.

A CEO that I've worked with has proven to me that having a long-term view and adapting are often the best practice. I can count 4 or 5 situations over the years where he might have logically quit because of situations foisted upon him by his board. He did not. He coolly and calmly examined each one and found a way to persevere. His company is better off and he has been rewarded handsomely. Through much hard work, he has now crafted a relationship with his board that is much healthier and more balanced.

It is not unusual for executives to have numerous situations in their career where they must consciously choose to adapt or fight. Here are some questions you might consider when (not if!) you run into your own nuclear situation:

1. Is this permanent or temporary?
2. Does it run afoul of my core values or just make me mad?
3. Is it really damaging to me and the business or just my ego?
4. Outside of fight or flight, what other options do I have?
5. Do I have unreasonable expectations about smooth sailing?
6. Who has gone through similar situations that I can learn from?

My experience is that it takes reflection, strong values, a bit of luck and a long-term view to reach the right conclusion.





Copy the 6 questions posed in this article and the next time you are in a tough situation that makes you want to quit or find a dark cave to hide in, write out the answers.



# CENOTE

## BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE ... DECISION MAKING UNDER DURESS

I recently talked with a CEO who felt like he was between a rock and a hard place. Frankly, he was! He was short on cash, and had neglected to recraft his business strategy as he watched his industry go through dramatic change. As he described his situation, I was reminded of a family event.

Years ago, I took three of my kids to Mexico for a vacation. We found a condo in Akumal, which had some outstanding beaches and great snorkeling. Several locals told us that we had to check out a local phenomenon called a cenote. For those who don't know (I didn't), cenotes are fresh water pools or sinkholes, often connected by underground rivers.

So one afternoon, we loaded our snorkel gear into the car and drove down this bumpy dirt road to find our cenote. We parked the car, walked down a dirt path and found this cave like structure with an absolutely beautiful pool of water in it. I'd already jumped into the pool when my daughter's mask fell in and started sinking. I dove down and rescued it, but unfortunately I didn't have my mask on and I lost both of my contacts. I was now vision-impaired but was determined not to let it affect our fun.

We all enjoyed swimming around this pool and watching sev-

eral scuba divers disappear below us. After a few minutes, a local boy yelled at my kids to follow him. He swam to the edge, took a deep breath and went under. Without a thought, all of my kids followed him ... and they didn't resurface.

Without many apparent options, I followed them and popped up into an air pocket perhaps 10 or 15 feet beyond the cenote wall. It was rather dark, which further challenged my already poor vision. I saw the kids but before I could find my breath to yell at them, the Mexican boy plunged underwater again with my kids following. I followed the kids and ended up in a smaller and darker space, and this time used an R-rated version of "Stop!" They did, but the local kid dove again and was gone.

I was now quite frightened. I didn't know where we were, didn't know the exact direction out, had poor vision and was feeling very responsible for the well-being of three other humans. If we went under and swam the wrong way, we were dead! We also couldn't just stay where we were.

This is how my CEO friend was feeling. Poor visibility, unsure where he was or where he should go, responsible for many people's welfare and no plan for the future (which had now become the present). He and his executive team had been treading water for many years.

Luckily for my kids, I found a wee bit of calm, used what information I had, asked for their concurrence that we were heading the right way and took action. Had we not done something, we would've used our energy treading water until we eventually ran out of gas and drowned.

This is pretty much the path that I suggested for the CEO: Gather information, involve your team in the decision and then take action. If you are someone who appreciates models, think of OAR. What the Objectives (musts and wants)? What are the Alternatives? What are the Risks?

Whether you're stuck in the water below a million pounds of rock or running a company, treading water isn't a good long-term strategy.





What big decisions are you delaying right now? If you had to make a decision today, what would it be?



# CYNICISM

## WHAT'S THAT GIANT SUCKING SOUND?

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**O**ptimism is one quality of an emotionally intelligent leader. Have you ever been part of a team led by someone who believed that their team was destined for great things? It's inspiring and fun and it gives you a fighting chance to scale tall mountains. (Too much optimism, of course, is delusional. When the horse is dead, you can't will it to victory. It's time to get off and find another horse.)

There is a dangerous disease that can suck the optimism out of a team faster than The Grinch can steal the presents from Whoville; cynicism. Although not the direct opposite of optimism (which is pessimism), cynicism can bog down an organization and put a good size ding in the culture. Can optimism and cynicism simultaneously exist in large quantities? I don't think so.

Having a small bit of this affliction, I appreciate the well-timed cynical comment that can lighten up a situation (for example, "Other than that, Mrs. Lincoln, how did you like the play?"). The problem occurs when cynicism becomes embedded in an organization through its conversations, meetings and even processes. When you start from a position of, "This ain't gonna

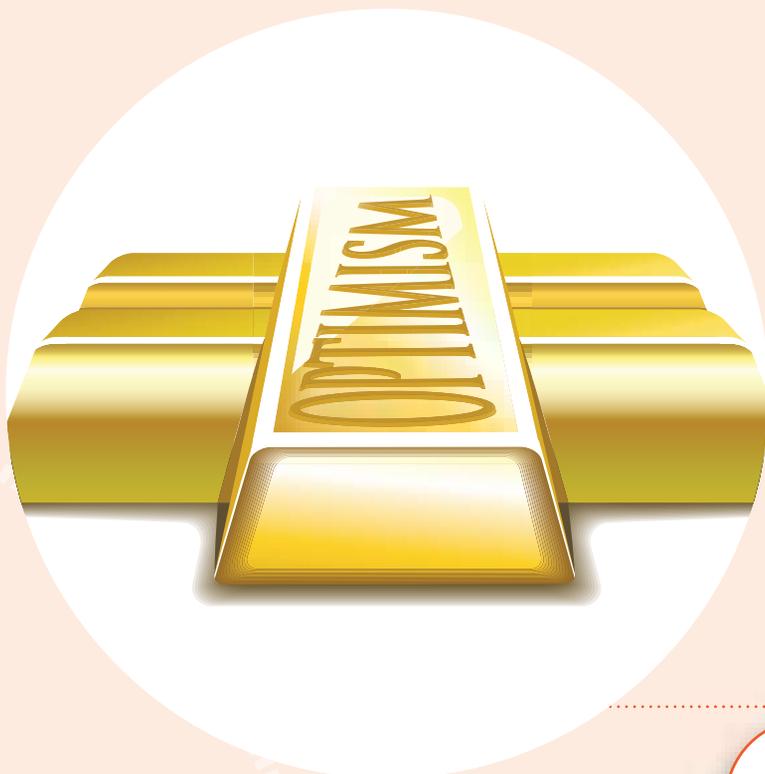
work,” or “All of my people are dopes,” you’re in trouble. Bart Simpson is cynical and funny, but no one will follow him into battle.

Cynicism robs people of energy. Why show enthusiasm for a new product, customer or idea when the room will just shoot it down? Cynicism also destroys innovation. If my ideas have to get through Calvin Curmudgeon to see the light of day, I’ll quit trying (or just quit). Cynics don’t see failure as a necessary step to success; they see it as predictive ... of everything!

Cynics also like to hang out together; they find energy at the bottom of the pool. Interestingly, however, they rarely offer solutions and are not good members of a team trying to solve a problem, as they just want to bring up more problems. I’ll bet there aren’t too many cynics in Apple’s product development organization. Cynics can’t stand to be around positive, optimistic people. It wears them out. They cringe when they hear words such as “Outstanding!” and “Great job!” because they believe good things happen to those who are lucky, not good.

Optimism works, and it’s infectious! Receiving no birthday card from my kids doesn’t mean they hate me; they’re unorganized! Bob isn’t lucky because he got that great account; he’s persistent! The situation isn’t hopeless; it’s a cool challenge that we can overcome! That’s the team I want to be on.





Next week pay attention to the meetings you are in and take note of the cynical and optimistic remarks made by others and yourself. Which one wins?

exposed  
fearless  
perfection  
kind  
fear  
leadership

vulnerable  
decision  
effective  
nice  
know  
success  
failure  
don  
ineffective  
control  
genuine  
consequences  
liberating  
trust  
concern  
intelligent  
stuck  
experience  
answers  
emotionally  
effectiveness  
right  
incomfortable



# EXPOSED AND FEARLESS

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I love getting older! Okay, not all elements. My knees hurt from the five surgeries I have had and I sometimes forget my wife's name—but age brings experience and perhaps a reduced level of concern about what others think. I don't blush as often as I used to when I say, "I don't know." I believe that my effectiveness is much higher when I quit worrying about having all of the answers.

Being exposed (vulnerable is another great word) is uncomfortable at first, but it is much more genuine than being a pretender. Do you really like working with Mr. Perfect who never admits defeat or the fact that he doesn't know something?

With a German mother, a personality type that wants to know all of the details, a desire to always make the right decision and a healthy fear of failure, I have had to fight the desire to control all situations. Being exposed does not come naturally. Running a nuclear power plant requires extreme control and little ambiguity. However, in most business situations, regardless of your role, admitting when you are stuck and sharing leadership with other group members can be very liberating and much more effective than shooting for perfection.

You may have heard, “It’s about success, not perfection.” Many people in a position of leadership—not all of whom are really “leaders”—would benefit from being more exposed. You really don’t engender trust in others when you always have the shields up. “Never let them see you sweat” might be good advice if you compete in extreme cage fighting, but it is really pretty naïve and ineffective in business. (Patrick Lencioni has some great thoughts on this in his book, “The Five Dysfunctions of a Team”.)

A close cousin to being exposed is being fearless. Have you noticed that some people are able to be completely honest in most situations, while others fret over the consequences? A good friend explained a work situation to me and wondered if he was being too honest with his boss. Being fearless can lead to unemployment, but constantly biting your tongue only leads to misery. Another friend taught me that it is much more important to be kind than nice. Being kind requires you to be fearless and allows you to say things that may sting but provide value; being nice is born out of fear. How do you respond to, “Do you like this new outfit?” “Oh yes, honey, and your butt looks really small!” or “You look much better in the other one.” Okay, so that might be an extreme, life-threatening example, but being kind requires us to be fearless; being nice is not always kind. (Please note that I was nice and didn’t specify gender in the above vignette, so no angry letters. Guys want small butts too!)

A word of caution: Being exposed and fearless requires that you are interacting with emotionally intelligent people. If you aren’t, why not? I learned early in my career that it is best to consider yourself self-employed at all times. While this attitude can lead you to find yourself out of a job in short order if you work for a jerk (or a board of jerks), I wouldn’t do it any other way.



When was the last time  
you said, "I don't know?"





# BLACK TURTLENECKS ARE NOT THE KEY TO SUCCESS

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*A boy asked an older rich man how he made his money.*

*The old guy fingered his sweater and said, "Well, son, it was 1934 and in the depth of the Great Depression. I was down to my last dime.*

*"I invested that dime in an apple. I spent the entire day polishing the apple and, at the end of the day, I sold the apple for 15 cents.*

*"The next morning, I invested those 15 cents in two apples. I spent the entire day polishing them and sold them for 30 cents. I continued this system for a month, by the end of which I'd accumulated a fortune of \$1.59."*

*"And that's how you built an empire?" the boy asked.*

*"Heavens, no!" the man replied. "Then my wife's father died and left us 10 million dollars."*

*— Author Unknown*

**T**hough it's been some time since he passed, people still frequently refer to the brilliant and mercurial co-founder of Apple, Steve Jobs. An article in the Wall Street Journal (Bio As Bible: Managers Sing Steve Jobs' Gospel, April 2, 2012) shortly after his death highlighted some CEOs who concluded that if they acted or dressed like Steve Jobs, they'd be successful. One had taken to dressing in black turtle-necks as Jobs famously did.

It's good to strongly identify with those whom you'd like to emulate or learn from. However, correlation is not the same as causation. Black turtle-necks didn't make Steve Jobs successful. Also, good results sometimes come from questionable practices or — as the story above tells us — luck.

I like to cook and occasionally try to re-create things I eat in restaurants. Sometimes I come very close. Sometimes I miss one or two critical ingredients that I couldn't identify and the result is poor.

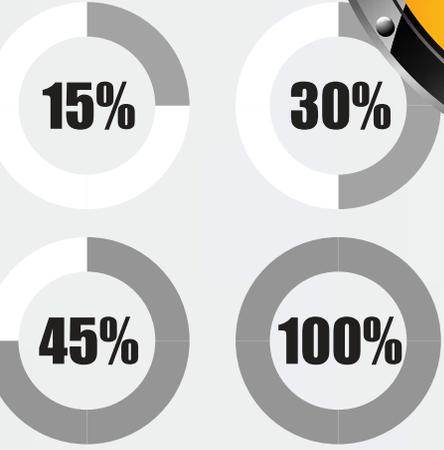
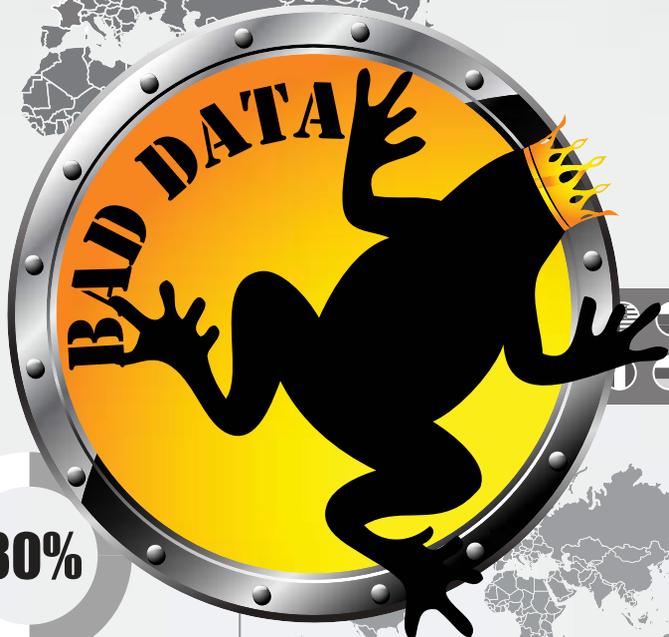
Berating people to do more or do better — a tactic that Jobs employed frequently — doesn't always work. You have to be careful not to take things out of context. Having high expectations of the right people coupled with appreciation, a reward system, positive feedback and autonomy can produce brilliant results. But when combined with abuse, low pay and tight control, it rarely works well. A prisoner of war complies when the gun is pointed at his head but escapes as soon as the gate is open.

Have you ever seen the movie "Once Upon a Time in Mexico?" A ravishing Salma Hayek plays opposite Antonio Banderas. After seeing this, I used to joke with my kids that when I was young, I looked like Banderas. Neither my kids nor my wife bought it. I could dress in leather pants and dye my hair, but that wouldn't get me a starring role with Salma Hayek; nor will the black turtle-neck make you as successful as Steve Jobs.

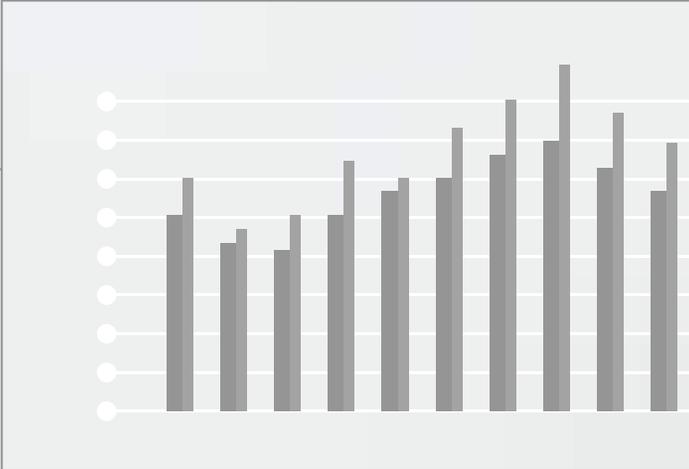
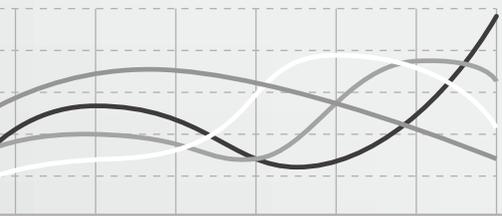




Are you confident that  
you are emulating the  
right people?



STATISTICS



# BAD DATA

**Y**ou could draw numerous lessons from the 2013 Twitter escapade where a false report about bombs in the White House (no, not that Obama and Boehner solved the debt problem ... boom-boom bombs) caused the stock market to temporarily destroy \$200 billion in value. Before Twitter, it used to take a gaggle of incompetent managers to do that!

The “sophisticated” programs that trade in nanoseconds were using bad data. These rapid trades, by the way, aren’t really investing; they’re just a rich man’s answer to how to trump card counting in Vegas. But I digress. ...

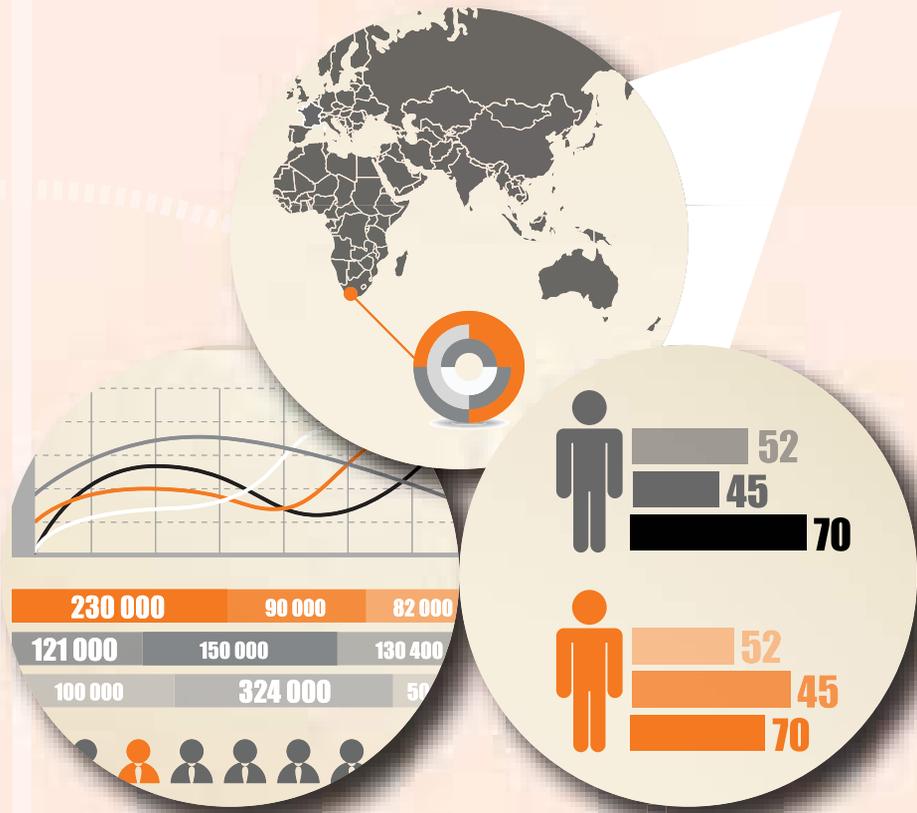
The problem with “big data” — the new, hip phrase bandied about by everyone from the CEO to the janitor — is getting your arms around it. The problem with “bad data” is that you got your arms around it, but it wasn’t a prince or princess — it was a frog.

I’ve seen too many organizations get sidetracked by measuring the wrong thing to their detriment and even demise. For example:

- Focusing on labor costs at the expense of service levels. You see this frequently in retail environments when you encounter understaffed stores with frazzled employees.
- Concentrating on gross margin and forgetting about net. Sometimes the overhead costs of dealing with a particular customer group or product line get “buried,” and what looks like a profitable customer or product is actually a stinker.
- Homing in on efficiency (for example, call time, response time, pizza delivery time) to the detriment of quality. Ever been disconnected when talking to a call center? They were probably measured on length of call.
- Focusing on profit and running out of cash (yup, it can be done). Showing profit while receivables and perishable inventory pile up won’t help. Being profitable but growing rapidly can also cause you to go broke.
- Concentrating on problems and not exploiting strengths. All organizations have problems; some need fixing. But if you do so at the expense of leveraging your strengths — whether people, products or markets — you’ll miss out.
- Using the wrong benchmark (for example, the number of new products introduced without regard for great products). Remember when Steve Jobs came back to Apple and killed many of its products to work on only a few “insanely” great ones?

What is measured can be managed, and not identifying the critical few things to gauge in your business is foolish. But there’s no point in counting how many cigarettes you smoke or Twinkies you eat if what you should focus on is the number of feet between you and the brick wall you’re about to hit...





What are the three most important things that you must measure?





# ARE YOU SEEING RED AND FEELING BLUE?

## GET OVER IT!



I woke up the morning after the last presidential election wondering what I was going to do for my daily dose of vitriol. Then I remembered that nothing really changed and we had a fiscal cliff looming. Problem solved!

With the rancor of the debates and the election soon to re-surface, what's next for business leaders? Whether, like me, you have a more conservative mind-set or, like a few of my extremely successful business clients, you have a more liberal mind-set, you have to deal with reality. Elections are supposed to provide clarity, yet they often leave many questions—especially for the business community. If you run an organization with employees, competitors and laws to follow, you've always had challenges along with the opportunities. You still have both.

For instance, as I write this, business leaders have to figure out what they'll do about health care for your employees. Hire people part time or full time? Employ fewer workers? Take the expense and cut elsewhere? Most of us haven't read all 2,000 pages of the health care law (maybe members of Congress have gotten around to it by now), but the impact on business is becoming clear, so you must plan for it.

Many business leaders have slowed down investment in capital expense areas. New computers, machines to manufacture widgets and the occasional Gulfstream G650, for the extremely successful, have been shelved. Some of this is prudent (you could probably get by with a G550), but much of it's irrational. I met a business owner prior to the last election who said if Obama were re-elected, he was selling his business and moving to an island nation. It's critical to have a rational capital budgeting process and to look hard at ROI, but for goodness' sake, buy the new widget maker if it makes sense (or grab some sunscreen and head for the beach)!

Most important, if you run a business in Colorado, you need to figure out whether you'll allow your employees to work stoned and play Bob Marley in the lunchroom! (I'm kidding on this one, though I'm thinking of opening up a new business for chocolate chip cookie delivery.)

Too many business leaders are treading water. Guess what? If the drain gets pulled, we all drown. Yes, conserve some cash, but don't stop running your business! Too many people have been like gawkers driving past a bloody accident on the highway, slowing down their progress for no good reason.

I'm working with a bunch of clients who are growing both the top and bottom line in their business. You can too! You still must have a strategy, and you have to execute brilliantly. But waiting for the political system to fix itself won't help you, your employees or the country. Whether you pine for Reagan or Clinton—he ain't here! Get over it! Let's do business!



Which external forces really impact your business and which are merely distractions?





# WORKS OF ART

## BUILDING YOUR TEAM

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**M**y wife recently returned from a clay workshop in Santa Fe with a life-size sculpture she made of a woman sitting with her legs curled beneath her. The clay woman was petite and well-formed, not a supermodel but certainly not fat. The 125 pounds of clay formed into the human shape were probably close to what the actual model weighed.

I later saw pictures of the model who sat for five days while my wife and the other artists created sculptures that were supposed to replicate the model. I also saw pictures of the sculptures the other artists made. Interestingly, the tall, thin artist made a sculpture that looked a bit like Olive Oyl from Popeye, while a buxom, rotund artist made a Rubenesque piece with large breasts and a torso plump enough to have made many trips to Dunkin' Donuts.

I'm not the first one to notice that art imitates life, but this was a comical depiction of it. I told my wife that my sculpture would've looked like Antonio Banderas. Hoping for a laugh, I only got one of those "what are you talking about" glares. (The fact that I look more like someone on the Pro Bowlers

Tour than Antonio must've had something to do with it.)

We too often do the same thing as organizational leaders: Hire and mold people in our image. I've noticed that start-up companies sometimes make extremely rapid progress when the initial team is homogeneous in terms of thought process. In one organization I worked with, I joked with the CEO that his team members were more like disciples than employees. Although this might give you a fast start, it can quickly become a very big liability. There's a vast difference between everyone aligning behind a vision and strategy versus a culture where everyone thinks alike and conflict is absent. Even worse, when the leader requires hero worship, you can end up with the business equivalent of Jonestown. It's all good until they hand out the Kool-Aid.

It's difficult to hire and appreciate people who have different ways of looking at the world. But sometimes the person who is a burr under your saddle can save you from a poor decision — if you listen. Mix it up. Hire people who share values and support your vision, but don't hire only in your own image. Also, make sure you develop the skill, patience and process to lead collaboratively. It takes more strength to be a post-heroic leader and integrate different thoughts than it does to have all disciples on the team.





Have you learned to appreciate those who have a decidedly different viewpoint than you do or do they just get under your skin?



# WHAT MAKES THE HOTTENTOT SO HOT?

*“What makes a king out of a slave? Courage! What makes the flag on the mast to wave? Courage! What makes the elephant charge his tusk in the misty mist or the dusky dusk? What makes the muskrat guard his musk? Courage! What makes the sphinx the seventh wonder? Courage! What makes the dawn come up like thunder? Courage! What makes the Hottentot so hot? Courage! What have they got that I ain’t got? Courage!”*

*—The erstwhile cowardly lion from the Wizard of Oz*

I recently attended a boardroom ethics forum. One position a participant offered was that a necessary and key characteristic of successful board members was courage. I like that word.

Courage might be defined as acting in the face of danger without fear. Or perhaps ignoring your fear to do what’s necessary. Although having courage alone isn’t sufficient to succeed as a leader (as the scarecrow from Oz would tell us, you must have a brain as well), this gentlemen’s comment caused me to think about the truly great, but not perfect, leaders I’ve worked with versus those who were merely presiders. Courage was one of the defining differences.

I wrote some time ago about Reed Hastings, CEO of Netflix, when he took the extremely unpopular decision to radically change his business model. Recent gains in subscribers portend that his courage might pay off. Likewise, Steve Jobs famously and courageously scrapped many products to focus on a few great ones when he returned to save Apple after it fell into disrepute.

Presiders, on the other hand, are most often hired guns with large salaries who don't have the chutzpah, passion or confidence to take courageous action. They continue to eat lavish dinners in the captain's quarters as the ship takes on water. Sunny skies and calm seas? They look great in their dress uniform with their hand on the wheel. When storms break out, however, their true mettle is tested.

Deciding which color to paint the conference room doesn't require courage. Giving rah-rah speeches about needing customer service, innovation or ethical behavior doesn't warrant much courage. Flying around in the company jet to slap backs or attend golf tournaments doesn't demand courage.

Hiring a senior person who'll stir things up requires courage. Making a strategic choice to abandon large markets or customer groups necessitates courage. Firing loved team members who don't have what you need to get to the next level demands courage. Looking at the future and deciding that your business model needs dramatic change requires courage.

Our cat Ike is as mean as a junkyard dog. He picks on the other cats, and I've seen him chase a fox out of our yard several times — once actually tangling with the fox and holding his own. However, the other morning, I watched a courageous female squirrel bull-rush Ike while defending her turf, causing him to run the other way. Courageous squirrel!

"You don't develop courage by being happy in your relationships every day. You develop it by surviving difficult times and challenging adversity."

—Epicurus



What courageous action have you taken this week?



# GO POPE, GO!

## THE COURAGEOUS ACT OF LEAVING

**I**n 2013 a guy with arguably one of the most important and toughest jobs in the universe quit with only two weeks' notice! He had a billion people in his organization. His "company" provided not just a housing allowance but a compound so impressive that it had an original Michelangelo painting ... on the ceiling! He had a security detail with velvet uniforms and spears. This guy was so powerful that he didn't answer to a board of directors — he answered only to God! And while he was undoubtedly under pressure, he voluntarily retired.

Leaders of organizations that require new blood, fresh ideas and a different skill set are often so wrapped up in their trappings that they forget the company is more important than they are. They grow long in the tooth, and their employees, customers and shareholders suffer as a result.

Although this may be correlated with age, correlation is not causation. The three factors I've observed that contribute to the "not yet dead, but still in office" syndrome are waning passion, reluctance to change and disinterest in learning. The company leader who ignores changing customer requirements and a shifting business environment eventually goes

the route of the Twinkie.

Public companies and those owned by “professional investors” rarely have this problem. If anything, they’re too quick to pull the trigger and convene the College of Cardinals. Family businesses, however, often struggle with transition. Founders may have the right to stay in office, just like the pope, but if their objective is to continue the business, sell it or transition to the next generation, they must ensure that they haven’t put their ego and need for control squarely in front of the goal line.

It takes lots of courage to be an effective leader. But sometimes it takes more courage to admit that you aren’t the right person for the job.





Are you the right person for the job? If not, what skills do you need or what actions should you take?



# HOW HIGH IS HIGH?

## YOU SHOULDN'T MEASURE EVERYTHING

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*"If you can't measure it, you can't manage it!"*

**I** lived much of my life believing this and in some measure (no pun intended), I still do!

Much of what we do in business can be measured and if you can measure it, you can watch trends, look for problems, experiment with new ways of doing things and track progress. However, sometimes rather than looking for X percent improvement we need to "do our best" and see what happens.

Psychologist and author Alan Weiss said:

"Every day I wake up happy. The last thing I want to do is measure my happiness. My goodness, the last thing I want to do is say, 'I'm really happy today, but I'm not as happy as I was yesterday.' That's going to ruin my whole day. I have the potential to be even happier every day, so I don't really measure my life. I think it's for other people to measure. I think it's for other people to say, 'Here is how this guy helped me.' 'Here is the difference this guy made.' 'Here is what a pain in the ass he is.' That's fine. But I don't measure my life. I just lead my life,

and I do my best to enjoy myself and be productive because if I do that well, then I help others enjoy themselves and be productive.”

The same approach can be used in business. What if you went to work tomorrow and rather than focusing on shaving 2 percent off of payroll, or adding 1 percent to your gross margin, or increasing on-time performance by 3 percent you asked, “How could we significantly improve this?” My experience is that you can sometimes get some great results that are way beyond incremental improvement by asking how you can move in a direction, but not limit the distance.

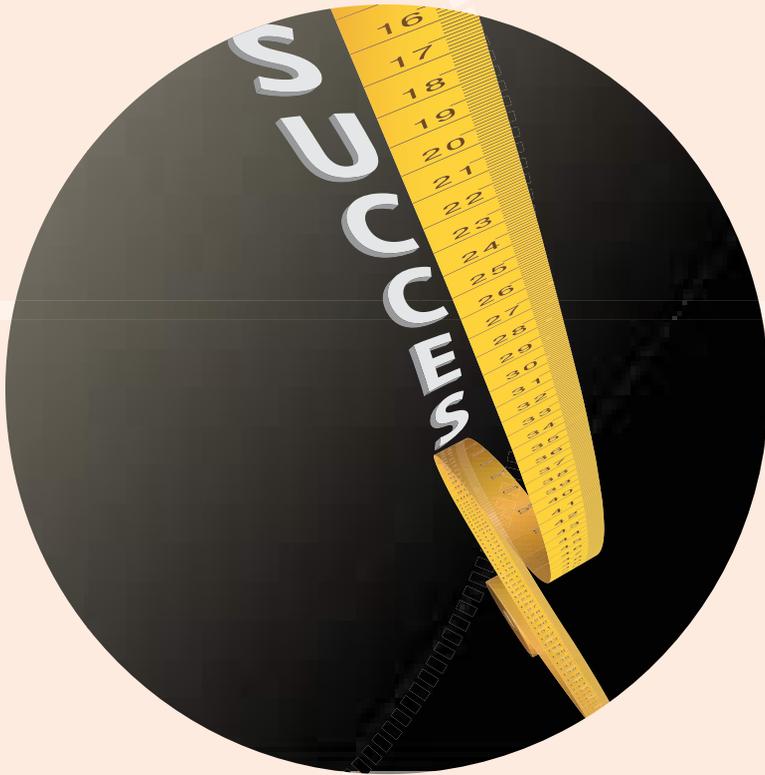
At the gym today, I watched a woman blow through her personal best in the dead lift because she put some plates on the bar that she hadn’t accounted for. Had she been paying attention, I guarantee you that she might have bested her record by 5 pounds, but not 30!

How high is high? What is good? I am not suggesting that you quit measuring everything in your business. To the contrary, my experience is that not enough is measured. However, when you are on your next bike ride and are still having fun at the distance you wanted to cover, keep going! Sometimes doing your best is the best way to success.

If the public companies that I work with tried to measure their effectiveness, management prowess or customer satisfaction by the daily swings in their stock price, they’d be bonkers! Sometimes you have to trust your gut—at least for the short term. Apple knew that the iPhone was ready for release when they thought it was “beautiful,” not a 9.3.



Go ahead; create the budget, but what if you wanted to blow through those numbers? What would you do?





# THE LADY'S NOT FOR TURNING

## ...OR BEING LOVED

*"Being responsible sometimes means pissing people off."*

— Colin Powell

I believe the following to be policy and results focused, not political, but just in case... I'm Todd Ordal and I approved this message.

It's nice to be liked and loved; it's just not an effective goal for a leader. If more leaders worried less about pissing people off (that's the last time I'll use the "p" word, lest I upset you!) the world might be a better place in the long run.

I was a great fan of Margaret Thatcher, but we all gravitate toward people whose beliefs we share. I don't know exactly where mine came from. They could've come from being a business owner, risking my own capital. Maybe from working in a union environment in college and watching people game the system. Perhaps because capitalism has saved many more lives than socialism. Maybe because I've seen successful, ethical businesses provide gainful employment and lots of joy for thousands of workers. Regardless, I think Thatcher was one of the most effective leaders of our time — and she had to p..., err, upset people to do so. By the way, she wasn't perfect, only successful.

The union workers I worked with were overpaid and underworked. Slamming a six-pack of beer on break and then getting back on a forklift was common. Threatening those who worked too fast — yes, I was one of them — probably seemed like good practice for them to keep others employed. They weren't bad people; a bad system misled them. They probably didn't think about how their work habits affected the price you paid for the product we distributed. They didn't mine coal, but Maggie would've justifiably kicked their rear ends, and it would've made them mad.

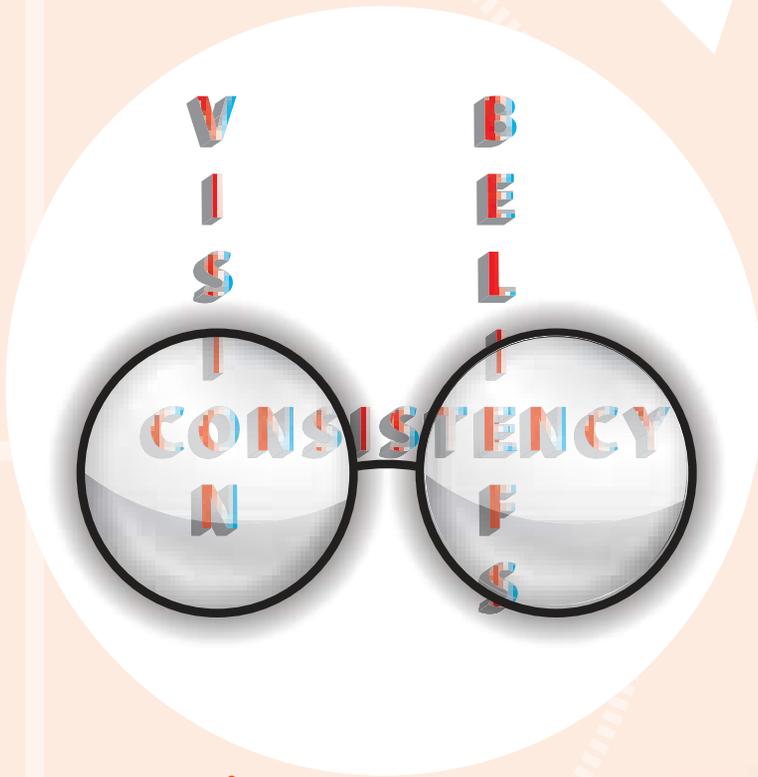
Clarity of vision, strongly held beliefs and consistency in action are exactly what we want from our leaders, whether in business or government. Avoiding short-term pain to the organization's long-term detriment is milquetoast in elected officials and business leaders. I'm sure there's a special place in hell for those who kick the can down the road.

Business leaders aren't hired to make friends; they're hired to get results. Getting results through collaborating, sharing rewards, having fun, being transparent and fostering commitment rather than compliance are good techniques! However, this doesn't mean using these practices will make everyone love you.

Your mother wasn't evil because she made you eat peas, and Thatcher wasn't evil because she made hard decisions for the long-term benefit of the country she loved. Thatcher famously said, "The problem with socialism is that eventually you run out of other people's money." If she'd been a businessperson, she might've said, "Being loved is a nice concept unless you want the organization to prosper over the long term."



If you take the long-term view and channel Margaret Thatcher, what actions would you take?





# THE RIGHT RAW MATERIAL

## STRENGTH IS REQUIRED BUT NOT SUFFICIENT

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*"If there is one central truth to be collected from the history of all ages, it is this: that the people's rights and liberties, and the democratical (sic) mixture in a constitution, can never be preserved without a strong executive."*

—John Adams (from "John Adams" by David McCullough) speaking about the office of the president

And so it is with business. A friend just called and we spoke about an executive we knew who was loved by his troops and customers, but he failed. He was a weak leader.

Strong executives may be collaborative, but they're decisive. They may be kind, but they don't avoid tough decisions. They likely understand and support pushing decisions to the lowest effective level, but they insist on great execution at that level. They don't need to control all the details, but they insist on high performance.

I've had the great fortune of working with numerous strong executives and some weak ones. Weak executives foster weak organizations, but strong executives don't necessarily foster

strong organizations. Strength — that is, power, decisiveness, forcefulness, fearlessness and confidence — isn't enough, but it's a darn good start. Couple strength with passion, intelligence — though brilliance isn't required — and emotional intellect, and you have the building blocks of successful leadership. Without these latter traits, a strong leader simply becomes a tyrant.

I've seen emotionally intelligent, passionate and intellectually capable people in senior leadership roles crumble because they weren't strong enough. Strong enough to stand up to their board when asked to do ridiculous things, strong enough to fire people who needed to be fired, strong enough to not need everyone to love them, strong enough to say "follow me" in a way people respond to.

We all know and love numerous people who are indecisive, lack force and confidence, and have many fears. It's unlikely, however, that those people are successful in executive roles. They may be brilliant artists, designers, engineers, scientists, caregivers or teachers, but they shouldn't be in leadership roles.

Both my wife and I lost our fathers at an extremely young age. Our mothers were wonderful and kind people but probably not innately "strong" as I've described it here. However, raising a family and figuring out how to pay the bills in the 1960s as a widow made them strong. Strength can be acquired, but not cheaply.

I believe leadership can be taught, but it's much easier to start with the right raw materials.





What fears do you have  
and are they holding you  
back?





# PACHA-WHO?

## THE GREATEST LEADER YOU NEVER HEARD OF

**O**K, a few of you might have. . . . But this guy never made the cover of *The Wall Street Journal* and had few financial resources, little to no technology and many hurdles. Yet he ignited a huge growth spurt and united a disparate organization into an empire! He built infrastructure to facilitate more efficient distribution, developed a complex communications system, and reorganized independent divisions into a centrally controlled organization with a large central office and well-thought-out division offices. He had a vision so strong that he started many projects that would take decades to complete. He led his team to develop manufacturing techniques that have yet to be rivaled even though quite a few years have gone by since he left office.

Who is this guy? Pachacutec. (Just like Prince and Madonna, he was so cool he's mostly known by only one name.) Pachacutec ruled the Inca nation in South America from 1438 to 1471. If you knew that name, you either have a master's degree in Peruvian history or you've spent some time kicking around in Cusco, the Sacred Valley and Machu Picchu with a guide.

I'm neither an expert on Peru nor Inca history. However, while

my wife and friends marveled at the architecture of Machu Picchu and the Inca nation of the 1400s, I drilled our guides about the guy who built all of this.

A few facts just so you know the story. A fractured Inca nation existed in South America with some humble dwellings. A group of approximately 40,000 Incas was led by a succession of kings who rapidly expanded the empire. A couple of bone-headed brothers eventually took the throne from their father and tried to be co-kings. I've written before about the folly of co-leaders, but suffice it to say that that dog don't hunt! Finally, along comes Pachacutec, a man with a vision and an ability to execute like perhaps no one before.

Pachacutec had some wicked smarts in the areas of architectural engineering, astronomy, astrology and leadership. Want a few examples?

- As previously mentioned, he brought together (OK, maybe conquered, but let's not quibble!) many tribes across a wide geography. Doing this in the corporate environment with telephones, email, video and jets is difficult enough. Try doing it with smoke signals!
- He oversaw building projects using masonry techniques that we marvel at today. Moving 50,000-pound rocks for miles and then crafting them into intricate shapes. Cheap labor and no OSHA program probably helped, but when you see these structures, you're either thunderstruck or you spent your childhood playing video games.
- These structures incorporated numerous significant features that perfectly align with magnetic north. They also have small windows that allow for sunlight to hit an altar at the exact time of summer and winter solstice. Oh, and by the way, some of them perfectly align with one another, though they're many miles apart. Machu Picchu has a running water supply (gravity-fed) that has never required

a weekend call to a plumber. Still works today! Imagine the planning required to do that!

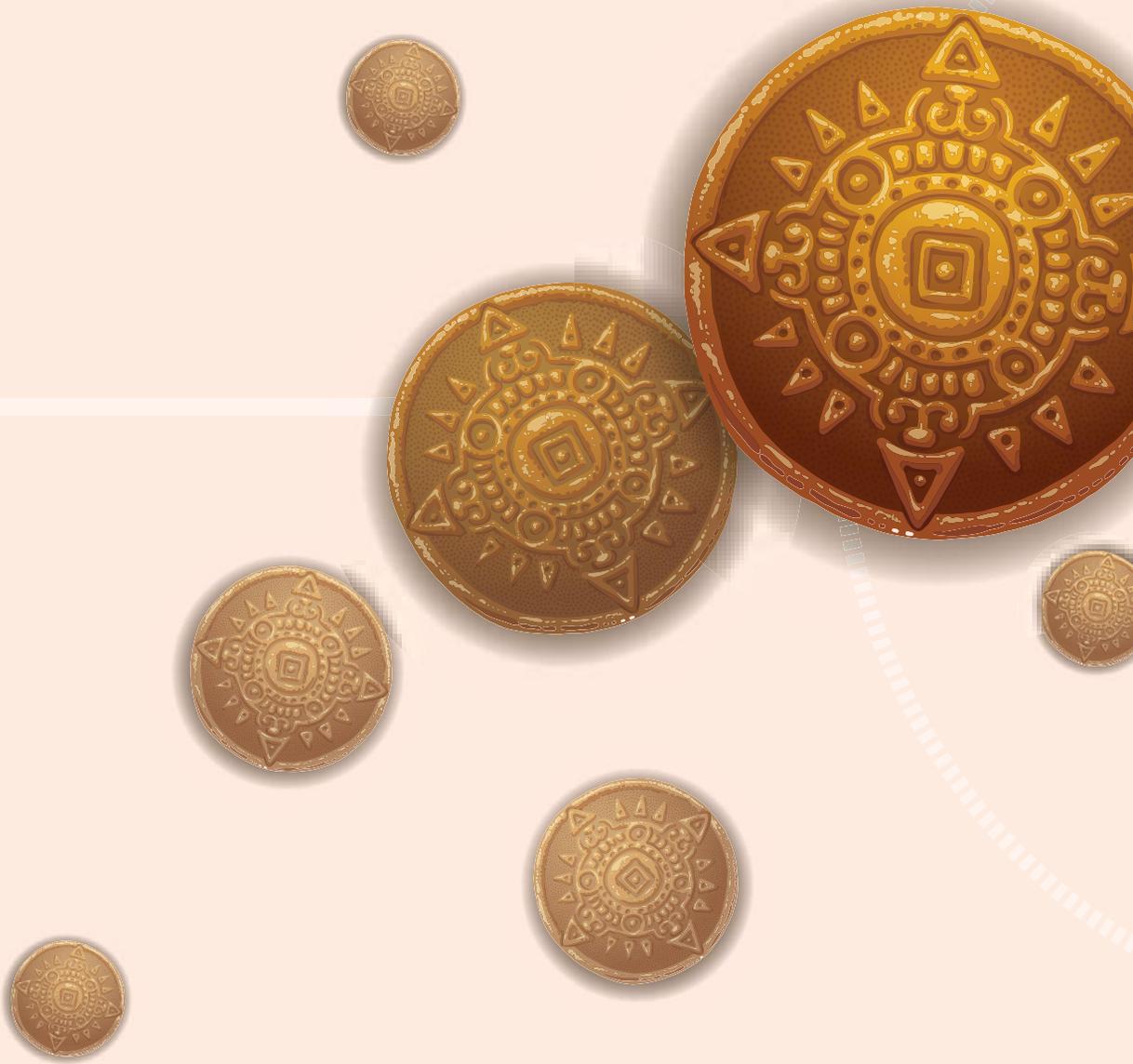
- Growing crops on a 40-degree pitch is a bitch! During Pachacutec's reign, the Incas built many tiered farming terraces high in the mountains that had complex drainage systems to feed their people.
- While Pachacutec ruled, he built a virtual highway system to connect South America's many structures.
- Pachacutec implemented a system of taxation to pay for all of this. (I wish I could send the IRS a bag of corn!)

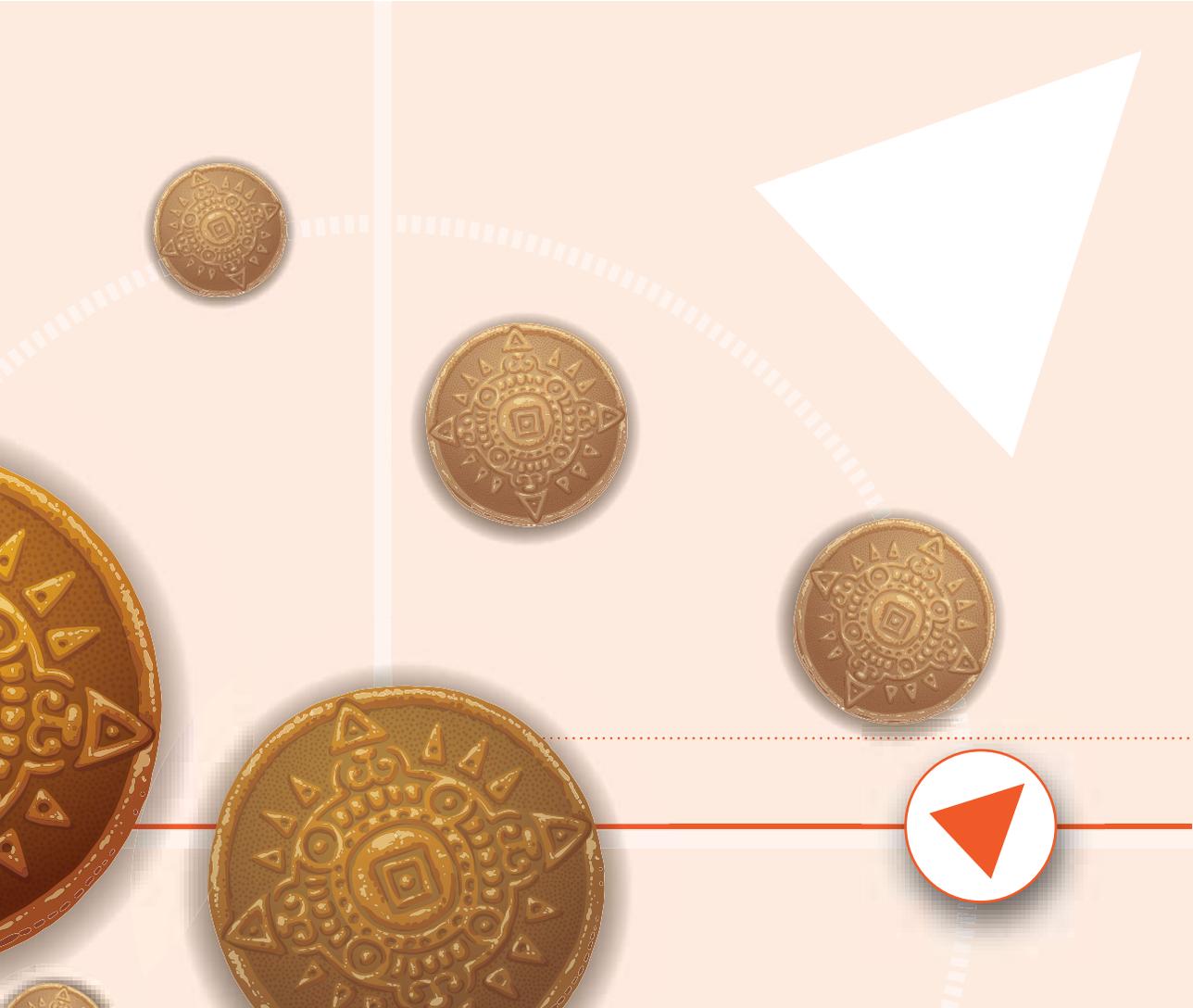
I could go on, but you get the picture. No real tools, no wireless technology, no air travel, no iPads, no horses, no guns and in fact, no written language. Yet this guy unites the people of a huge geographic area and builds an aligned group of beautiful structures into a highly functioning organization that would be nearly impossible to do today.

If Pachacutec had a biographer following him during his reign, I suspect we'd know that this was a man of great vision, exceptional communication skills, superior strength of character and a sharp sword. What I'm most struck by is that the power of his ideas accomplished so many things. Execution? Yes, of course, with cheap labor. But the long-term vision for a great society (or company) is so hard to find today.

On the other hand, it only took the Spaniards a short while to destroy this organization when they showed up with horses and guns and a fixation on gold. My takeaway? The value of a long-term vision and exceptional execution with the realization that you must stay current with technology and techniques to keep the gold!







Is your vision compelling, your strategy sound and your ability to execute at a high level? Strip away the excuses! You have roads, telephones, the Internet and flushing toilets!



# RAREFIED AIR

## LACK OF OXYGEN IN THE C-SUITE

**W**hen I started flying high-performance aircraft at high altitudes many years ago, my friend and I decided to conduct a test. Above 12,500 feet, you're required to have oxygen (OK nitpicker pilots ... between 12,500 feet and 14,000 feet, you can noodle around for half an hour without it). We took a non-pressurized airplane to 17,500 feet (the maximum altitude at which you can fly before someone from air traffic control wants to be very involved in your life) and took turns flying without oxygen for quite a while to see what impact it had. The effect was gradual but quite noticeable. It varies from person to person, but the typical response at this altitude (which has only half the atmosphere of sea level) is to turn blue, get really stupid and fall asleep. For some, this sequence happens quite quickly, so don't try this at home.

Ascending an organization to a senior level, particularly the C-suite, has the same impact as flying at altitude without assistance. No, you won't turn blue, but you'll have less oxygen and be prone to do stupid things that can lead to a rapid descent. In fact, you'll have less time and fewer peers, and you won't hear the truth very often.

Like a talented athlete, you'll be told how good you are. Many people will want to be around you and will tell you what you want to hear. Are your jokes really funny? Are those strategic ideas that you're about to implement really brilliant? You'll eventually succumb when you start to breathe your own exhaust and fall asleep with the controls in your hands. Just like when a pilot crashes, the crew and passengers will take the ride down with you (a few smart ones might have brought along parachutes).

So how can you avoid this? Put on your mask! Find a way to get the input you need, not the input you want. If the people you're around the most have also been flying at high altitudes for some time, make sure they aren't breathing the same bad air before you take their advice on anything.

What are you doing to make sure you're getting the oxygen you need?





Who are your truth talkers  
and what is your process  
to make use of them?



# IT'S WHAT YOU KNOW FOR SURE THAT GETS YOU IN TROUBLE!

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**W**hen I was young, my mother told us that if we swam within half an hour of eating, we'd die! (If you're over 50, I'm sure you heard the same thing.) We were also told to put on baby oil before going into the sun. (That now sounds like child abuse!)

Remember when red meat and eggs were bad and pasta was good for you? And in case you hadn't heard this one, the earth is not really flat!

In many cases, you don't know what you don't know. However, another great way to get in trouble is by knowing for sure that something is really true.

Here are my top five troublesome truths about leadership:

1. You should minimize conflict. This is another one my mother taught me, and she was flat-out wrong. In an organization, you should optimize conflict, not minimize it. Avoid conflict at your own peril. I've seen far more trouble in company cultures for too little conflict rather than too much.

2. It's all about the execution. Hogwash! Bad ideas executed well just cause you to fail faster. You must be heading in the right direction. Strategy first, then execution; they're equally important. Execution, however, is a daily thing (managing complexity). Changing strategy is typically infrequent, which makes it hard to do.
3. Be nice! No ... be kind. Kind means that you'll tell people what they need to hear, even if it's painful. Nice people often avoid tough conversations and fear upsetting someone else. Nice managers always find something to compliment you on. Kind managers tell you what you need to hear, even if you're screwing up.
4. Only hire brilliant people. This is partially correct. Emotional intelligence, however, is more important than being the smartest guy in the room. In most jobs, I'd sacrifice 20 points of IQ to find someone who is self-aware and socially aware and has good self-control and social skills.
5. Be solutions-oriented. Sometimes you need to find quick answers, but I believe it's much more important as a leader to focus on asking the right questions. More time crafting great questions will yield better answers. Too often, we're solving the wrong problem!

What do you know for sure that's getting you in trouble? Spend some time examining your rule book, and you may find some troubling truths.





# RULES



What do you know for sure  
that isn't working for you?



# LOW AND SLOW

The 2013 crash of a flight into San Francisco brought the phrase “low and slow” into the public press. I’m not currently flying, but I used to spend many hours behind the yoke of a multiengine aircraft and have come close to that experience a few times. There are other apropos phrases the flying community uses to describe similar situations. “Behind the power curve” is one I like. Well, don’t like in the Facebook sense, but like as a descriptor.

When you’re behind the power curve in an airplane, adding more power won’t increase airspeed. Weird, huh? (This gets technical and it has to do with parasitic and induced drag.) The only way out is to lower the aircraft’s nose. Note that doing so while close to the ground isn’t a natural act — it’s counterintuitive and damn hard! When you combine behind the power curve with low and slow, bent metal is probable.

I was thinking about this situation as I recalled a business owner who wanted growth but didn’t really want to change. He’d spent less time at work but hadn’t handed off real responsibility to his No. 2. He was no longer staying current on business trends. The more change he encountered, the harder

he fought to control things with his existing toolset. In other words, he was behind the power curve — pushing on the throttle but not getting the expected results.

When leaders get behind the power curve, bad things can happen, just like in airplanes. If there's a lot of existing cash flow and a relatively large addressable market, it can take awhile for things to go "clunk." However, if the business is low and slow — with a finite amount of cash, an increasingly competitive market, perhaps changing technology — disaster can happen quickly.

In the Asiana flight, the pilot pulled up on the nose in the last seconds of the flight, but there wasn't enough airspeed to produce the kind of result he was looking for, thereby exacerbating the problem.

Allowing your company to lose airspeed (competitive strategy, cash and skill set of management) puts you in a compromised position, one where hitting the gas may not work. When I hear that business leaders want to "coast," I worry for the tenure of their business. There really is no cruise in business. You're either trying to climb or you're descending, whether you know it or not!

When you train for flight, you practice recovery from stalls at high altitudes with an instructor so you know what to look for and how to respond. There are, however, some situations so dangerous to train (engine-out stalls on some multiengine aircraft) that it's best to recognize the situation but never actually perform it, even in training. In business, going low and slow behind the power curve is one of those.



What are you doing to  
move your business ahead  
and keep your skills sharp?



**LOYALTY**  
**=**  
**PERCEIVED**  
**REWARDS**

# LOYALTY IS NOT FREE

## BUTCHERS, BREWERS, AND BAKERS...

*"It is not from the benevolence of the butcher or the brewer or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their self-interest."*

— Adam Smith, *"The Wealth of Nations"*

I'm always amazed at how many leaders expect people to work against their own self-interest. Some examples: Pitch in on an extra project for no possible reward. Sell new accounts when being paid handsomely for existing revenue. Show initiative when constantly second-guessed. Care about the company's financial performance when treated like a mule and sharing no gain.

Some of these leaders complain that there's no loyalty anymore. There may be some truth to that, but I see it more as an algebraic equation.  $L$  (Loyalty) =  $PR$  (Perceived Rewards).  $PR$ s, however, can mean different things to different people. Several of my kids who are in their 20s are extremely loyal to their employers, but they also get high  $PR$ s. One daughter's  $PR$  is working with other talented artists, even though her monetary rewards are low. My other daughter gets to work on environmental issues that she's deeply committed to. My son's  $PR$  is monetary. If my daughter who works with artists

had to work with capitalists like me, she wouldn't be as loyal. (I'm still working on her...) If my other daughter had to work for a smokestack industry, she'd be home on the couch at 5:15 p.m. If my son didn't receive good tips as a bartender, you wouldn't catch him volunteering for another shift when he has an 8 a.m. class.

A few years ago, I met with a CEO who didn't understand why he couldn't get people to come in early or work past 5 p.m. He "couldn't find any good people." He tried mandating longer hours (you can imagine how that went over). He tried hiring new people... repeatedly. He tried tightly monitoring employees' work. However, he didn't try positive feedback, allowing them to come up with their own solutions or sharing any of the large amount of money he made every year — heck, every week! He expected big L with very little PR. In algebraic terms,  $L \neq PR$ .

Some people have a natural reservoir of L because they expect rewards. They have a positive outlook and bust their tail. I love working with people like that! However, they still need PRs to stay engaged over the long haul. Others tend toward the "show me the money" end of the spectrum and only put out good energy if they see the reward plainly and quickly. If handled correctly, they can be great assets as well.

The invisible hand of self-interest (apologies to Adam Smith) can either guide your actions as a leader or slap you across the face. Make your choice.





Ask your people two questions: 1) What is the value that you are adding to the company? 2) What rewards to you get for doing so?

# RETURN ON TIME



# RETURN ON TIME

## THE BEST INVESTMENT YOU'LL EVER MAKE!

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*"The only reason for time is so that everything doesn't happen at once."*

*-- Albert Einstein*

**I**n business, we talk a great deal about "return." Return on investment, cash-on-cash return, return on equity and return on invested capital are a few. However, whether you're a CEO or a sales rep, perhaps your most important measurement of return is your return on time.

Most of you reading this book have a good deal of discretion as to how you spend your time. It's unlikely that someone forced you to read this. You decided that at this moment, this is what you should do. (Hint: If this topic has no interest to you, stop now and move on.)

The \$59 time-management seminar I went to 30 years ago started off with this statement: "Regardless of who you are, we all have 24 hours in our day." I don't recall anyone jumping up to argue. This obvious point still holds true today. However, we now have 537 cable channels, Facebook, cell phones, email, You Tube and much more traffic to contend with. I watched *The Jetsons* as a kid and thought about how cool it

would be to have all of those gadgets and a robot maid so I'd have more free time. I'm still waiting.

I've worked with many leaders and often had conversations with them about how to best spend their time. As a result, I came up with Todd's Seven Timely Tips for Increasing Return on Time.

1. Clarify your values. A great place to start taking control of your time is by identifying your values and then determining whether the activities and time you're investing (or squandering) are consistent with these values. (If you want a vehicle to examine your values, email me and I'll send you a free exercise.)
2. Be assertive. You don't need to have a relationship with everybody who rings your doorbell or calls you on the phone. Trying to be nice to everyone prevents you from doing what you should be doing. A talented client who's CEO of a large company recently said, "I don't want to be seen as a jerk, but I just can't go to lunch with everyone who asks." Some will see him as a jerk, but he's right.
3. Plan. If you don't plan, how can you know what's most important? If an activity doesn't take you closer to your long-term objectives, do you need to do it, or did you get side-tracked? (It's OK to look at shiny new things occasionally.)
4. Use "comparative advantage" to your advantage. (If you aren't familiar with the economics term "comparative advantage," look it up. I swear it'll be a good use of your time.) If you love to mow the lawn, great! If not, get someone who's faster and find a better outlet for your time. I had a client who swore he could do everything better than all of his employees. He probably could, but he was miserable and couldn't grow his business as a result.
5. Define wealth in terms of discretionary time, not money.

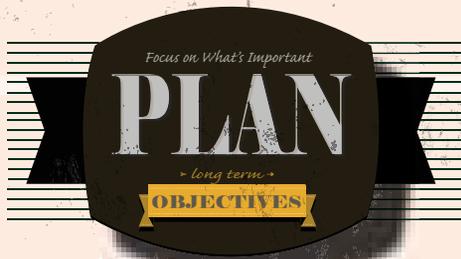
This causes you to think differently about your activities and what has value. The guy above was financially very wealthy but couldn't take a vacation even though he could afford to buy a jet to do so! I'm writing this on a Monday. I'm skiing tomorrow because there's supposed to be a foot of new snow. (Admittedly, it might be a late night tonight!) Tomorrow, I'll be wealthier than the guy with the pile of money.

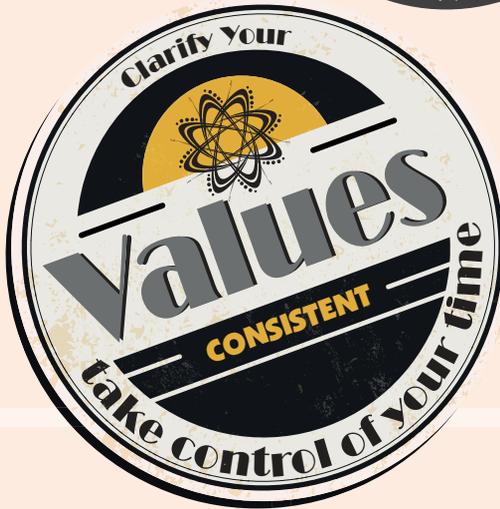
6. Recognize that longer is not better. Pretend you're hiring me as a consultant to help you solve a large problem. It's going to take six months and require a \$250,000 investment, but it will bring in \$3 million in new revenue. Wait ... I just found a way to do it in five minutes. Does this have more or less value to you? Longer is not better; it's just longer.
7. Relax. Nobody gets this right all the time. Just course-correct frequently.

Take five minutes right now to reflect on this and identify what you can do differently to increase your return on time. Do it now!

*“...And then one day you find  
Ten years have got behind you  
No one told you when to run  
You missed the starting gun  
And you run and you run  
To catch up with the sun  
But it is sinking...”  
--Time, Pink Floyd*

I hope this provided you a generous return on time.





If you had to increase your efficiency by 50%, what would you do? Why not do it now?



Optimism

Impulse  
Control

Emotional  
Intelligence

Assertiveness

Self  
Perception

# TEMPER TANTRUMS

## EMOTIONALLY INTELLIGENT LEADERS

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I've met a couple of business "leaders" who scream at their employees like coach Bobby Knight "discussed calls" with referees at basketball games. I've tried the tactic myself in years gone by with marginal results, both at home and in my previous leadership roles. Is screaming completely ineffective? Absolutely not. As a young manager, I got positive results several times from displaying a short fuse. In addition to creating momentum, it also allowed me to assert my authority and feel good for a fleeting moment. So what's the problem?

How many of you know anyone with real talent who has put up with abusive leadership for an extended period? How many of you who have experienced abusive leadership would say that you were at the top of your game in that environment? I don't think that I've ever said, "How can such a \_\_\_\_\_ (pick one: jerk / bonehead / tyrannosaurus / primordial-organism) have such a talented and motivated team?"

Leaders who have temper tantrums on a frequent basis lack emotional intelligence. Abusive or know-it-all leadership is—in my experience—all about control. Control is not always a bad thing, but I have observed that teams achieve much more

when there is trust vs. fear, commitment rather than just compliance, mutual accountability vs. individual gain. Patrick Lencioni wrote a great little book called *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* that provides a good model for leaders who know that it is not “all about me”. The 5 dysfunctions are: absence of trust, fear of conflict, lack of commitment, avoidance of accountability and inattention to results. You’ll find most of these in an organization where screaming is a prevalent management technique.

Management guru Warren Bennis is one of my favorite authors on leadership. In his article, *The Four Competencies of Leadership*, he talked about the need to manage: attention, meaning, trust and self. Two of these (trust and self) are key components of emotional intelligence (EI). IQ is a good predictor of success in school, but not such a great predictor of success in leadership positions. Daniel Goleman and others have written about emotional intelligence and its impact on success. Evidence says that IQ might help get you the CEO’s job, but you’re most likely to get fired for lack of emotional intelligence. It is virtually impossible to influence IQ, but the good news is that emotional intelligence can not only be measured but also learned.





If you are frequently angry at work, is it possible that you are really angry with yourself?



# CONFIDENT RATHER THAN CERTAIN

*"I prefer a confident president to a certain president."  
-- Madeline Albright*

I like this quote a lot. It reminds me of our now retired family medical doctor, a down-to-earth guy with many decades of experience. Although he had the silver hair and degree that allowed him to answer most questions with certainty, he had the confidence to sometimes say, "I don't know!" In fact, he once dragged me into his office area from the exam room, pulling out a medical textbook to see if we could find an answer together. Pretty rare for a profession full of know-it-alls.

When I first heard the Madeleine Albright quote, I thought about leaders I'd known or worked with over the years and which of these two buckets they fell into. Those who were confident but not always certain were more successful, more fun to be around and more respected by their teams. Those who were always certain (think Donald Rumsfeld) were constantly one step away from a catastrophic error. And if it came, they had little support from those around them. Know-it-alls who fall rarely get help up from anyone.

The further up the ladder you get in an organization, confidence becomes more important and certainty more dangerous. Adhering to rigid dogma virtually ensures your failure.

A recent Harvard Business Review piece (“Long CEO Tenure Can Hurt Performance,” March, 2013) points out that financial performance dictates that a CEO stay in office 4.8 years. That’s the point when the company’s financial performance peaks. The authors hypothesize that as CEOs get entrenched, they start to “breathe their own exhaust” (my words, not theirs), and they reduce the amount of outside input they receive. There are numerous behavioral reasons that correlate with reduced financial performance, but from my experience, they often become too “certain.”

So you’re a CEO who’s been in place for 4.7 years. ... What do you do?

1. Keep learning, formally or informally. Your current knowledge may be as much of a detriment as a benefit.
2. Don’t continue relying on the same sources for your view of the world. Look for new data points and fresh relationships, including some outside of your company and industry. Especially look for points of view that differ from yours.
3. Review your vision and strategy. Are they really still relevant?
4. Find a thought partner or coach who’s not afraid to push your buttons and ask hard questions.

Experience helps us learn which ideas and behaviors lead to success, but that same experience can be a detriment as well. Be confident, but when you’re certain, when you absolutely know you’re right, be cautious!



What are you doing to continually learn and find new sources of information?





**Todd Ordal, President of Applied Strategy LLC, works as a thought-partner to CEOs and their senior teams to enhance organizational performance through better strategy and effective leadership. He is a former CEO with 32 years of leadership experience and is also a Certified Management Consultant™ and a certified executive coach.**



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