

## When Is Leadership Not Enough?

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As leaders, we often affect the well being of our organizations. Leaders offer vision, motivation, and empathy to those who work with and for us. We offer sage advice, pearls of wisdom, and the integrity of character in all that we do. But, what if leadership is just not enough?

“For everything you gain, you lose something,” said Ralph Waldo Emerson in speaking of change. Change wrecks havoc with the mind, body, and spirit. How does it affect leadership? How does it affect the well being of the organization? Typically, change always has a price – people are affected by change. Consider this situation.

A satellite organization was floundering. The Cracker Jack with the ideas and vision was dispatched with a plan to help the organization. The Cracker Jack was welcomed by the members of the organization with kind words and graciousness. When asking questions of staff, the Cracker Jack was provided with answers of “that’s how we’ve always done it.” There was no desire to do more, do better—the organization was content to hang on to something that was comfortable. Following a strategic planning session, the Cracker Jack developed a plan that was shared with staff.

Each person in the building, whether a direct report or ancillary staff, was provided this information and each was asked to 1) be part of something bigger than themselves, and 2) to be open to opportunities. Staff was given the opportunity to take on additional responsibility or to work in their gifting. A team environment was launched. Everyone worked together and great strides were made organizationally. *Esprit de corps* ensued.

The next step in the strategic plan was to petition for additional staff with direct responsibilities for specific tasks. Justification was provided and the central office authorized more funding for new personnel. With the introduction of new staff-- with fresh ideas and out of the box thinking-- a wind of discontent spread through the organization. This discontent manifested itself in destruction of the *esprit de corps*.

The leaders’ vision, dreams and plans remained constant. There were increases in key areas of market encroachment, branding, and partnerships with similar organizations. The possibilities were good.

However, while the leadership was working on these things, they were blindsided by the discontent until such time as the Cracker Jack was threatened directly. Learning of the discontent, the Cracker Jack began meeting with staff, soliciting input on the changes, and attempting to listen to the people. However, no input was provided directly to the Cracker Jack. No conversations could be transacted. No information was shared. It was a closed mouth tight ship. Indirect communication through third parties centralized in Human Resources Department communicated staff discontent. The Cracker Jack was instructed to conduct a 360-feedback evaluation.

Was this the best human resources could offer or suggest? Why a 360-feedback? Was this to identify the situation to the leadership, or as ammunition against the Cracker Jack? The outcome of the 360 was an unusual curve. If the groups were isolated between direct report,

ancillary staff, and third party vendor contacts, much could have been gleaned. However, human resources could not or would not isolate the groups. The key finding of the 360 report was that much of the staff believed there was a lack of communication by the Cracker Jack. What?

The Cracker Jack had feedback that did not address the discontent, and was considered inconclusive. The Cracker Jack communicated progress frequently, held weekly and monthly meetings, shared successes and gains with staff, and rewarded exemplary behavior. But the 360 stated a lack of communication stain remained. The Cracker Jack was replaced immediately.

The discontent pursued and got worse with the replacement. After six months, the replacement found employment elsewhere and the satellite organization was closed due to lack of accomplishment of stated goals and objectives.

**Was it leadership or the lack of leadership?** I would suggest that it was neither leadership nor a lack of leadership, but a couple characteristics the Cracker Jack took for granted. Robert Rosen, in his book *Leading People*, offers eight principles of leadership. In this case, Rosen's concept of *trust* is paramount in this situation. Rosen said, "without trust, vision becomes an empty slogan. Asking employees to take risks, be entrepreneurial and give up the known for the unknown, requires a strong foundation of trust." The Cracker Jack misjudged the effect of change on the staff that resulted in the effort to instigate change on the staffs' terms.

There is a difference when making such organizational decisions when the leader is someone with roots as opposed to someone who, through no fault of their own, is climbing or ascended up the corporate ladder. The Cracker Jack was an outsider who believed all were on the same page in terms of organizational needs and success. In truth, a home grown, in-house leader would have had a better chance for forging change into a successful venture. Jeffrey Immelt at General Electric and his rise to leadership there is a good example of roots.

Lauren Keller Johnson, in her book *Bad Leadership: What It Is, How It Happens, Why It Matters*, said that there are intemperate leaders who lack control over their hunger for money or power; callous leaders who ignore or discount the needs and wishes of others in the organization; corrupt leaders who lie, cheat or steal, putting self-interest before the needs of the organization; insular leaders who disregard the welfare of external stakeholders outside the organization; and rigid leaders who are unable or unwilling to adapt to new ideas, new information or changing times. The Cracker Jack put the plan out and solicited input; put the needs of employees first by enabling them to work in their gifting areas; and, engaged the team, including those considered ancillary staff.

**So was it leadership or not?** I believe this situation had nothing to do with leadership; it was simply criticism. Critics are staffers who have yet to find anything right with the company, their boss, or their co-workers. These people constantly whine and complain about what and how things get done, but never offer ideas on how to improve the situation. Their main mission is to convert others to their cause. Take heed and notice these critics; they occupy roles in all organizations and can snuff the life out of your organization and you.