



Harry Franzheim—an HR/OD Practitioner for over 30 years—has published this newsletter to bring you careful insight into reducing costs and unlocking employee potential.

AT ISSUE

*Not listening, not trusting, not understanding, not asking questions, and acting like commanders and control freaks are not traits of a successful leader. Companies need to foster an environment that prevents leadership failure.*

## Leadership That Leads to Failure



### HR Fact:

#### The Peter Principle: Why Things Go Wrong

The theory: You do your job, you're promoted. You do that job well, you're promoted again. This keeps happening over and over until eventually you rise to a position that you can no longer do well—or your level of incompetence. There you either stagnate, revert to a lower position, or get fired.\*

\* AOL.com Editors, Nov. 22, 2010

\* The Peter Principle, Dr. Laurence J. Peter & Raymond Hull

We see it time and time again: good employees that are technically proficient getting promoted to positions of leadership (lead, supervisor, manager) with little to no expertise in human interaction and team dynamics. As a result, many organizations fail to realize the full potential of their human capital and they spin in a cycle of oppressive, self-sealing patterns of behaviors that frustrate employees and management alike.

In fact, the biggest obstacle to growing leadership talent is found in organizations in which most if not all of management “came from the ranks” without any formal leadership training or human interaction theory. And thus the cycle continues.

#### It's a Complex Challenge

Training alone is not the answer. Spending money sending a lead to a one-day class or bringing in a consultant to provide hourly training sessions without considering the

### Why New Leaders Fail (plenty of blame to go around)

- Employees that get promoted are too proud to ask for help.
- The manager of the new supervisor, who made the promotion decision, is too proud to suggest that the new lead get some training.
- Senior management is too far removed from the situation to see and understand the toll an ill-prepared new lead takes on the workforce to suggest training for new leads.

culture and the overall HR system is a waste of money and can lead to increased frustrations throughout the organization.

“Expectancy Theory of Motivation” (Jac Fitz-enz, *The ROI of Human Capital*) comes into play in a significant way when we start asking employees to behave differently from the way they have been for years. It's hard to adapt new behaviors when no one else around you is and the effort for doing so is not regarded or rewarded. That's why training alone is not the answer. It might be psychologically satisfying to be spending the money and “investing” in your people by training them, but without a systems approach to the problem (because the system is the problem), change in behavior will be unsustainable.

#### What Is the Problem?

To solve any problem we need to have a problem statement. Here it is: “We promote people into leadership positions without

leadership ability.” Why would any organization consciously make this same mistake time and time again? Root cause can be found by asking “why” five times to get to the bottom of this error. I will spare you the time and the exercise of asking “why” five times and get to a possible root cause: The senior management team is not in agreement about the expectations of leadership. Ask them independently what they think is the role of leadership and you will get as many different answers as the number of senior managers that you ask. Worse yet, they may default to the current set of outdated behaviors demonstrated among leads, supervisors, and managers and defend those in an attempt to fend off the presumption that there is a cavernous lack of effective leadership within the organization that they oversee!

### Enabling Structures

The results of any organization are a function of the current state of design. It’s immaculate and perfect...it may not be desirable, but the system is cranking along in an exact fashion as intended. Want different results? Change the system!

- The hiring process.
- The assimilation processes.
- The compensation practices.
- The reward practices.
- The feedback and feed forward processes.
- The communication networks and practices.
- The disciplinary processes.
- The team development practices.
- The training and development practices.
- The leadership practices.
- The life/work balance practices.
- The termination processes.

All of these processes and practices must be considered and aligned to bring about the desired change in leadership practices. Each of these creates a supportive structure that holds behaviors in place. Senior management must consider the “whole system” when bringing about behavior change for leaders. Failure to recognize how these

processes and practices are interrelated and interdependent will result in a sub-optimized organization and failed change initiatives.

### Enabling Behaviors

And this is where it starts getting tough. Senior management has created patterns of relationships with their direct reports. The same is true for everyone in a managerial/supervisory/lead position. The question at hand is “how helpful are those patterns of relationships when behavior change is needed?”

Study the relationships of a human resource manager and watch as they protect, defend, console, applaud, and cajole employees. The HR manager sees him or herself as responsible for the employee and believes it is his/her job to care for them. The HR manager becomes the parent to the now enabled child we call an employee. The HR manager routinely gives second chances and cuts deals with employees saying, “Don’t let me down.”

The same holds true for other senior managers in the organization—they treat employees as if they are children who must come to them for their approvals, their assignments, and their acceptance. “Good employees please their bosses, trying to make them proud” just like children do to avoid the disappointing scowl, the turned shoulder, or the ambivalent attitude from Mom or Dad. Once they became “leaders” they were given tacit approval by their boss to unleash the power and the glory on the poor people they were supposed to be leading! And the cycle continues.

Recognize that it is psychologically rewarding to be the center of your work team’s existence and to say to yourself, “Without me these people wouldn’t know what to do.” To stand at the front of the factory handing out assignments, spouting directions, playing the part of commander-in-chief might make you feel important but all it is doing is fueling a workforce of chil-

dren as employees that cannot and will not think for themselves despite being every bit capable of doing so—perhaps even better than you the general!

### They Are Adults!

Employees are adults and leaders ought not be commanders and control freaks. Instead, leaders must learn how to treat employees as adults by first seeing that each of them is much more capable of contributing more to the organization than the current state of things allows. Read that again.

Leaders will need to trust their employees. They build trust by giving them the latitude, time, and patience to learn how to become proficient in their assignments. Leaders need to learn how to ask questions more than to give directives. And when you’re asking more questions, you need to know how to listen, really listen. Listening is not a signal of weakness or that you must adopt or buy in to what is being said. Leaders need to listen to understand. Employees as adults often have solutions to problems unknowable to the leaders. Remember, those closest to the problems are also closest to the solutions.

### Tough Love

If you truly care about your people you will let them fail. You will help them learn from their failures. True change in an organization comes about when managers/supervisors/leads learn to let go of the answers and become comfortable with asking questions and listening. It may not be the most expeditious way to get things done, but it is the most lasting. Senior managers must not rush in to protect their direct reports when the impact of the change is causing tremendous angst and anxiety. Senior and HR management will be inclined to “put things back the way they were” because they don’t have the trust, the knowledge, or the guts to bring about the needed change to the structures and the behaviors within their organization. And so, the cycle will continue. **ne**



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Volume 7, Issue 26, 2016

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