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**Lessons Learned from Your Worst Leaders**

Businesses remain in a quandary. Optimism is up. Sales are lackluster. Unemployment remains high. Customer service expectations continue to rise. Cash remains king. For example, just take today's Wall Street Journal's headlines: The private sector added 217,000 jobs; however, layoff announcements increased for the second month in a row. Nothing is simple. How can you get a jump on the competition? There's no doubt in my mind - it boils down to leadership and execution.

Yet, if leadership and execution were easy, wouldn't we all be wildly successful already? Thus, it's worth taking a look at not only the keys to success but also what we can learn from poor examples. How about our worst bosses? Instead of chalking the experience up to one you'd like to forget, think about what you can learn from it. Why not get something positive from a potentially horrible time of your career?

I have the dubious advantage of seeing several examples of less effective leaders from not only working with and for a multitude of leaders while in corporate life but also with my clients. Based on those observations, I've picked a few of the top mistakes of the worst leaders: 1) No idea where they are going. 2) Doesn't know how to get there. 3) The world's worst communicator.

1. **No idea where they are going:** The first tenet of leadership is to define strategy - in essence, where are we going? You don't have to have all the details nailed down; however, you must know where you are headed. Would you get in the car without any idea of where you are going? Or why? Hopefully not - even when I was in a sleep-functioning sort of consciousness one day almost 20 years ago, I knew I was headed to work. I just was headed there several hours too early.

The organization (or department) cannot follow if the leader has no idea where he/she is going. Or, worse, because he is the leader, they will follow. Then, many people are going nowhere. Talk about a recipe for disaster and frustration!

Instead of going down this road, stop and rectify the situation. If you are the CEO, you must stop all other priorities, assemble your team and determine where you are going. Or if you are an executive or department leader other than the CEO, ask! Don't assume communication should occur. Be proactive. Participate in defining where the company is headed. At a minimum, define the strategy for your area of responsibility.

2. **Doesn't know how to get there:** Although there are many examples of leaders not knowing where they are going, there are even more examples of those who have no idea how to get there - or simplifying what it takes to "get there". This point implies that the leader either isn't aware that he/she doesn't know how to get there or isn't asking/ involving the appropriate people in determining the optimal path and implementation plan. Of course, the worst examples think they know how to get there while it's obvious to everyone else that they have no clue!

Instead of falling victim to this pitfall, discuss the strategy, ask questions, listen, and ensure to involve the appropriate people in developing and implementing the plans of how to get there. One of the most common mistakes I see is when leaders bail on how to get there. After all, it might not be perceived to be as interesting - and it can be hard work.

On the other hand, the leaders who consistently deliver bottom line results stay committed and tied into how to get there. They do not dictate; instead, they stay focused, ask questions, influence, incorporate feedback, encourage progress, push back and communicate. They also don't stay tied to a losing strategy or implementation plan because it's defined. They'll address the hard facts upfront. And they never kill the messenger.

3. **The world's worst communicator:** I'm sure we've all seen this leader! Perhaps surprisingly, I've found it doesn't require charisma to be a successful communicator. Instead, the critical differentiator of an effective communicator boils down to integrity and trust. People will quickly forgive a leader for communication mishaps (which are bound to occur) if they trust them and know they want the best for the company and the people. It can be as simple as that.

Another secret to communication success lies in asking questions and listening. Being informed enough (about people, processes, systems, culture etc.) to ask good questions is not nearly as easy as it sounds. However, as important as asking questions can be to success, don't get carried away. Asking the wrong questions at the wrong time (or even the right questions at the wrong time) can be disastrous. If people lose faith in you, you have a mountain to climb - your competitors will pass you by while you huff and puff up the mountain.

Those companies who found a way to thrive during the recession and are focused on leveraging the recovery have one element in common - solid leadership. I've found that it can sometimes be easier to learn from mistakes than successes - what can you learn from your worst leader?

## Lisa's Tips: Leveraging Your ERP System

Another way to succeed in today's new normal is with innovation and leveraging already-existing assets. As I thought about leveraging ERP systems for a speech I gave earlier this month, I thought a few tips and questions to ponder might be of value:

1. Improve service: how can you utilize your system to provide exceptional customer service?
2. Reduce lead time: can you surpass your competition by delivering 10% quicker by leveraging functionality?
3. Efficiency: Take a fresh look at everything you do on a daily basis. Look for ways to automate. |
4. Accuracy: focus on data integrity and your accuracy will improve. It can lead to improved profitability, cash flow projections and service.
5. Customer partnerships: how can you leverage your system to support customer collaboration? How about product development? Freight partnerships? Customer programs such as VMI?

## Recommended Reading

"[Publicize Your Book](#)" by Jacqueline Deval - as I've been focused on books that relate to speeches and my book proposal, I chose this one to share, as I think it goes beyond book publicity and provides practical tips and techniques that could be utilized to achieve a variety of publicity goals. As marketing and PR is key to anyone's success, I think it's worth a look.

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