

"LEADERS WHO CAN'T MANAGE"

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LEADERS WHO CAN'T MANAGE

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ABSTRACT

This paper warns about the various psychological forces which can affect leaders and cause dysfunctional behavior. Among the factors discussed are the effects of transference reactions on leaders and followers, isolation from reality and the loneliness of command, and the somewhat paradoxical fear of success. Recommendations are given of how these pitfalls of leadership can be avoided.

Looking back, many who had been acquainted with Robert Clark realized that discordant words had rarely been spoken about him - that is, before he assumed the presidency of the Solan Corporation, a company in the heavy equipment field. Robert had always been very well liked. His then superiors had been impressed by his capacity for work, his dedication and his imaginative way of tackling problems. And in spite of having the drive to get things done at work, he seemed to be a genuinely nice person, always prepared to help and ready to spend time with those who asked.

From the moment Robert had entered the company he had been recognized as someone destined to go far. And the soothsayers had not been off the mark. To the delight of many, he had crowned his seemingly brilliant career by being selected to succeed the old CEO. There had been a lot of excitement in the air in the period immediately after Robert had taken over, and he had received quite a few accolades for his role in taking a number of long overdue steps. He had approved a reorganization of the regional sales force and given the go-ahead for a new performance appraisal system. But - and many of his old colleagues had come to the same conclusion - some time after he had taken charge, a transformation in his personality had seemed to take place. It was hard to describe in precise terms what had really happened. But whatever it was, most felt it was not a turn for the better.

The first sign that something was changing in Robert was his greater inaccessibility. Some wondered what had happened to his once widely acclaimed open door policy; his statements about wanting to be a "hands on" manager. But that was not all! What about his notions of participative management? They all seemed to have gone down the drain. Instead, he had become increasingly authoritarian, impatient and careless of the feelings of others.

Robert's aloof, authoritarian behavior spelled problems for the company. In their desire to please him, his key executives would jostle for his attention, and spend time and energy on power games and intracompany squabbles rather than on strategic decisions. Outside market forces were neglected in favor of fulfilling political ambitions. Morale had sunk to an all time low. And as to be expected the financial results had been dismal.

The above sketched scenario is not all that far-fetched. An executive who to all appearances seems bright, likeable and well-adjusted, reaches the top of an organization and increasingly resorts to strange behavior. Why he or she is suddenly behaving differently seems inexplicable. It comes as a great surprise to all.

Why is this the case? What psychological forces affect executives when they reach a position of power? What might be the cause? What role do subordinates play in the matter?

In answering these questions one should realize that although the psychological forces that will be described affect everyone who is in a position of power, only some people fall prey to them so that their actions become inconsistent. It is not so that leaders necessarily change when they reach the top: they don't have to behave according to Lord Acton's famous dictum "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely". On the contrary, many new leaders do very well. They manage to handle the pressures that leadership brings. Their way of steering the company may lead to revitalization and transformation. And the enthusiasm of a new CEO may be contagious in that it helps motivate subordinates to do things beyond normal expectations. Sometimes, individuals who have been rather colorless before may even turn into great leaders when they attain a position of power.

Unfortunately, however, history has also provided us with examples of the opposite extreme: leaders whose behavior became pathological once they had attained power. We only have to think about political leaders such as the biblical King Saul, Rome's Caligula, Hitler, Colonel Gadhafi or business leaders such as the first Henry Ford or Howard Hughes. Of course, I am not suggesting that the average business leader will resort to pathological behavior once reaching the top of his or her organization. However, to a greater or lesser extent, some leaders do seem to undergo a mysterious transformation on attaining power. Before they take over such leaders may come across as very likeable, well

adjusted persons, but they seem to undergo a sudden change when they rise to the top.

ON ATTAINING LEADERSHIP : A WORD OF CAUTION

When you assume a leadership position what can happen to you? What things do you have to look out for? In answering these questions, you have to realize that a leader's role is a paradoxical one: at one level you appeal to the rational abilities of your followers, at another level your message and theirs is directed at symbolic, often unconscious processes. Since in leadership analysis we usually only deal with the former, it is to the latter that I would like to pay some attention.

A Mutual Confusion

As a leader there will be an important task lying ahead of you and that is to articulate to your subordinates a vision of the future of whatever you want to try to accomplish and the means to get there. But apart from being the catalyst to achieve the objectives of your organization though product market selection, the securing of resources, resource allocation, competitive initiatives, administrative choices and other forms of action, as the person in charge you become, whether you like it or not, the recipient of your subordinates' ideals, wishes, feelings and fantasies. And subordinates, by transforming subjective into

objective reality, may imbue you with mystical qualities. This may occur in spite of attempts on your part to resist it. What happens - and we have to remember that this is usually not a conscious process - is that some kind of "false connection" takes place in the minds of your subordinates. They may become "confused" when dealing with you: they may perceive you and respond to you not according to the facts of the situation but as though you are a significant authority figure from their past such as a parent, other caretaker or sibling. When this happens the boundaries between past and present disappear. It is easy to see that the attitudes, fantasies and feelings which were appropriate in the conditions that prevailed in a person's early relationships can become inappropriate and anachronistic when they resurface in the context of the present.

As an actual authority figure, you are a prime outlet for these types of emotional reactions. Given your position, you will easily revive previously unresolved conflicts with significant figures from the past. When this happens, regressive behavior may occur: followers may endow you with the same magic powers and omniscience which in childhood they attributed to parents or other significant figures.

This process of modifying and distorting the whole context of relationships is called transference and is present in all meaningful interactions. Although you may find it hard to accept

this, all interpersonal exchanges seem to be a mixture of realistic and transference reactions. And you, in particular, being in a leadership position, will be susceptible to this kind of confusion (1).

Transference reactions can be acted out in several different ways and will affect both you and your subordinates. One common manifestation is for your subordinates to "idealize" you in an attempt to recreate the sense of security and importance they felt in early childhood when being cared for by an apparently omnipotent and perfect parent. As an authority figure, you slot easily into the subconscious in a "parent" role. Subordinates therefore may be tempted to endow you in their minds with quite unrealistic powers and attributes: this in turn can inflate your own self-esteem.

Particularly during periods of organizational upheaval - cut backs or dramatic expansion - subordinates will cling to their belief in your powers as a way of maintaining their sense of security and identity. And in order to have you respond to their needs, subordinates will do anything to please or charm you - they will even give in if you have extravagant whims or flights of fancy. It also means that in times of organizational crisis there exists the danger that you may be surrounded by "yes-men". This lack of critical review in decision making can obviously have dire consequences for your organization.

The Other Side of the Coin

If you are subjected to uncritical admiration on the part of your subordinates, you may begin to believe that all the admiration is deserved - that you really are as perfect, intelligent or powerful as others think is the case. Losing one's grasp on reality in this way is a common human failing but it is particularly dangerous in the case of leaders since they often have the power to act on it - to turn some of their fantasies into reality. When a CEO stops listening to valid criticism, embarks on an overambitious expansion scheme or erects lavish new company headquarters without apparent need, it may be that this process is at work.

Because of their desire for grandiosity, some leaders will lean towards subordinates with high dependency needs, people in search of an all knowledgeable, all powerful leader. But the subordinates may be in for a shock. Preoccupied with grandiosity and having become intolerant of criticism, such leaders can be very callous about the needs of their subordinates. They may exploit them and then drop them when they no longer serve their purposes.

Subordinates may legitimately react angrily to such behavior. However another, less obvious, process may also be at work: subordinates may subconsciously blame their leader for failing to

live up to their own exaggerated expectations. Angry about this, and perhaps aggravated by callous, exploitative behavior, they may quickly turn from admiration to hostility and rebellion. There seems to be no middle road - in the same way as a child does, such people tend to split all experiences, perceptions and feelings into unambiguously "good" and "bad" categories. Of course, in doing so they ignore the complexity and ambiguity inherent in all human relationships - they refuse to accept that the same person can have both "good" and "bad" qualities. Thus, although as a new CEO, you may initially have been welcomed as a messiah, you may be surprised to find how suddenly their mood can shift. After one setback, your subordinates may view you as responsible for all the company's problems, even if these long predate your arrival.

Faced with a change from admiration to apparent rebellion and anger on the part of your subordinates you may become irritated, having slight persecutory feelings. It is much easier to deal with admiration - in spite of its dangerous consequences - than to cope with being the target of aggressive feelings. But as a leader, you have to realize that some of it is inevitable. This being the case, a certain amount of self control is required. You may be tempted, however, to retaliate - firing the critics is an obvious reaction. Some leaders tend to "split" their subordinates into those who are "with" them and those who are "against" them; the former can do no wrong and the latter no right, and an organizational culture of fear and suspicion is the likely

outcome. Subordinates who are "with" their leaders better share their outlooks and support them even if they engage in unrealistic, grandiose schemes or imagine the existence of malicious plots, sabotage and enemies. No wonder that paranoia is considered to be one of the major "diseases" of leadership. Effective leaders, however, know how to contain their excessive emotional reactions and avoid being caught up.

To illustrate how these various psychological forces can affect you, we can take the following incident. Due to the sudden unexpected death of his predecessor, Ted Howell was appointed as the new president of the Larix Corporation, a company in the electronics equipment field. Ted had been found with the help of a head hunter who had highly recommended him. Previously, he had held a senior staff position in a company in the same line of business. A key factor in convincing the board to take him on had been Ted's knowledge of the industry.

When Ted assumed his responsibilities, many welcomed him as the long awaited messiah, expected to turn the tottering Larix Corporation around. Under the previous regime the company had been in the red for a number of years. Something had to be done now to reverse the situation.

Soon after his arrival members of the board saw signs that Ted had difficulties in dealing with the pressures of the job. A number

of rash decisions made in his first week at the office could be construed as being the first indications of trouble. But in spite of these mistakes, everything initially turned out better than expected. First, Ted had a lucky break in that one of the company's main competitors went out of business. This freed up an important segment of the market. In addition, one of his subordinates came up with an excellent marketing idea which he quickly adopted as his own and which proved to be very successful. True enough, some executives were bothered by the fact that their colleague never received credit for it. But whatever could be said about this, both factors helped to get Larix back into the black.

This success, unfortunately, seemed to have gone to Ted's head. He didn't recognize how lucky he had been. After the turnaround, he thought everything was possible. Somehow, he seemed to imagine he was like the mythical King Midas, turning everything into gold. Making a considerable show of it Ted embarked on a dramatic expansion program, ignoring cautionary remarks made by subordinates, consultants and bankers. And as if this were not enough, other steps were taken, one being a move of the company's headquarters to what Ted thought were more suitable surroundings, and the other being the acquisition of an expensive company plane. Not surprisingly, these actions put a heavy strain on the company's finances. Those executives who disagreed or expressed their concern about these new moves found themselves fired.

Consultants who suggested that Ted change course suffered the same fate. In the end, only those executives inclined toward sycophantic behavior, willing to share his grandiose ideas and accept his aggressive outbursts, remained. As expected, the unrealistic, overblown plans and the high expenditures put the company back into the red. Ted, however, was unwilling to admit his role in all this. When questioned at directors' meetings, he would become defensive and deny any responsibility for the losses. Instead, he would blame them on faulty moves made by his predecessor, or on vindictive action by a number of executives who were "fortunately" no longer in his employ. He did mention, however, that there were still some "rotten apples" in the company, but said he would soon get rid of them. In his opinion, a turnaround was just around the corner. To an increasing number of members of the board, however, Ted's behavior was becoming unacceptable. Eventually, having become impatient with the continuing losses and Ted's imperious, paranoid behavior, they managed to remove him.

As in the case of Robert Clark, what we can see happening here is that an individual - apparently perfectly adjusted and capable in his previous job - is promoted, but, when subjected to the various pressures of the new job as a leader, starts to behave irrationally.

One contributing factor seems to have been the excessively high

expectations placed upon Ted by his subordinates. Overwhelmed by all the attention which he was suddenly receiving, he seems to have allowed his sense of reality to become marred. And perhaps because of his inability to withstand these psychological pressures he may have assumed that some of the qualities ascribed to him were true and behaved accordingly. Getting more applause turned into a major preoccupation for him. When, as expected, his grandiose actions backfired and he was unable to deliver, his subordinates reacted with anger. Ted retaliated, however, showing signs of paranoid behavior, and started to put blame on others.

The distortive reaction patterns which I have described are in fact a major factor contributing to this strange, irrational behavior we sometimes find in leaders. These reaction patterns are semi-dormant tendencies with which we all have to deal and which revive easily in situations of leadership. And as I have indicated, some of us find it very difficult to withstand their pressures.

This leads us to ask whether these are the only pressures we have to deal with when in a position of leadership. Are there other factors to be considered?

ISOLATION FROM REALITY

On June 18, 1982, the body of Roberto Calvi, Chairman of Ambrosiano, Italy's largest private bank, also called "the Bank of Priests" because of its close links with the Vatican, was found hanging under Blackfriars Bridge in London. Although the exact circumstances of his death will probably never be known, this was a very ignominious ending for one of Italy's most prominent bankers. It was also one of the saddest outcomes of Italy's biggest scandal, involving illegal bank transactions, a secret Masonic-style lodge named P2, the Mafia, and the Italian secret service. An investigation revealed that Ambrosiano was heavily in debt. Moreover, hundreds of millions of dollars were missing (2).

The extent of Calvi's involvement will probably never be known. He certainly carried a heavy responsibility in the matter. His secretive, control-orientated management style didn't help, and his remoteness was an added complication. When things came to a head, he must have been under tremendous strain. There were pressures from the bank of Italy who wanted an explanation for the extremely high exposure of loans. The stock exchange was pushing him to reveal the bank's major shareholders, a matter he was not eager to clarify since with the help of "ghost" companies he had effectively acquired control over the bank himself. Creditors were calling for money. There were threats from Michele Sindona, a shady Sicilian financier who was later convicted of extortion, fraud, perjury and misappropriation of funds both in Italy and the United States. Once considered "friends" at the Vatican and in

the Christian Democratic establishment were deserting him in droves or manoeuvring to have him replaced. Then there was the blackmail by those providing him with "protection", his sentence for illegal capital exports, and various other judicial investigations which were snowballing.

From the newspaper accounts we get a picture of a man ill at ease at social events, not a person for small talk. Roberto Calvi was described as the most private of Catholic financiers, an individual who was very reserved and formal: communicating with him was a difficult task. From the various descriptions of him he seems to have been a person who would internalize his problems rather than confide in anyone.

Without question, the events which led up to the final denouement were dramatic enough, but even so, did it have to end the way it did? Why did Calvi get himself in this situation? Didn't he have another choice? Couldn't he have solved his problems in some other manner? Or was this really a case of foul play?

We cannot really give answers to these questions. We don't know Calvi's motives for acting the way he did. What we do know, however, is that in spite of the sea of executives reporting to him he seemed to have ended up very much alone in dealing with all his problems. From the various reports it appears that there was no one he could turn to, and this seems paradoxical in light of his contacts and his very active life. Unfortunately, this kind of isolation in a sea of people seems to be all too common among

people at the top of organizations. And such isolation can affect one's sense of reality.

The term "loneliness of command" has been used frequently in the context of leadership. But is this a realistic concept? Is it an illusion created by leaders when, in fact, they may need no one? Is it just a platitude, or is there something very real about it? Actually, it may be better to speak of the loneliness of command in the context of isolation from reality. The inability to test our perceptions, the tendency to lose touch with reality, is a danger we can all fall victim to when in a position of leadership.

For example, when Peter Harris took up the position of president of the Noro Corporation he expected business to be as usual. He imagined that not much would change in his lifestyle, that he would continue working much as he had before. The appointment had been very much routine. As one of the senior vice-presidents of his company he had been the logical choice for the job.

Events, however, turned out to be quite different. Peter had to deal with more changes in his lifestyle than he had expected. Soon after he assumed the presidency he realized that, in spite of his efforts to maintain the same amicable operating mode, he was creating more distance between himself and his subordinates. Although he tried for a while to be one of the boys, he discovered that this was no longer possible. Things had changed.

For example, there were his activities after work. He remembered

how much he used to enjoy having a drink with his colleagues. He had always seen it as an ideal opportunity to let off steam. And it had other advantages. Many times, a quiet chat over a drink had helped him solve a knotty problem. But now, somehow, it had become harder to do. He had even dropped his weekly tennis game with an old time colleague. As an explanation he had used the worn out pretext of having too much work. The never actually stated, but real, reason was that both had felt increasingly uncomfortable in continuing their old relationship. At the heart of the matter was Peter's difficulty in socializing with and having to make tough career decisions about the same person. Life seemed much simpler if he retained some distance. And what added to his change in attitude was that he had also discovered that friendliness to a subordinate was quickly interpreted by others as favoritism; attempts at closeness by a subordinate were similarly seen as a lobbying effort.

Although by keeping his distance he simplified matters, it didn't come without a price. He found his new way of behaving very frustrating. He increasingly felt a sense of isolation, a loss of intimacy. Somehow, he felt left out, cut off. Of course, he had his wife to talk to. But that didn't seem to be enough. She was busy with her own work, and she had her own things to worry about. He would have liked to confide in someone more familiar with what happened in the business, someone on whom he could test his ideas.

Sometimes, nostalgically, he would think of old times, the period before he became president. Everything had seemed to be so much

simpler and easier. He remembered the fun he had had exchanging thoughts and ideas with his colleagues. And he recalled how he could always go to his president for help. But when he had become president himself his whole fabric of social interaction had been disturbed. Occasionally, he found himself longing for a way to resurrect the broken network of relationships, searching for a way of sharing. But it was just impossible. A side-effect of it all was that he found himself becoming increasingly irritated about having gotten himself into this position. It was not what he had expected. It made him wonder to what extent his increasing aloofness was affecting his ability to make sensible decisions.

What can we learn from this example and the one of Roberto Calvi?
What psychological forces are at play?

As I have indicated before, as the organization's leader you are supposed to take care of its existing strategic and structural needs. You are expected to articulate a vision of the future and show others how to get there. But as we have seen, there are a number of other aspects to leadership. One of these is to take care of the dependency needs of your subordinates. But - given the universal nature of these needs - the question then becomes: who is taking care of your own dependency needs? When as often happens, there is nobody to take care of these needs, some people may suffer from anxiety associated with loneliness and disconnectedness. Some may even lose touch with reality.

You may discover to your great dismay, when you reach the top,

that your network of complex mutual dependencies has been disturbed. You may be able to overcome this and find other forms of gratification. Some leaders may even have a mind-set which is counterdependent, actually favoring detached behavior. This kind of compatibility, however, between personal make-up and position, is not that common. Instead, some leaders may become upset at finding themselves in this situation, and may react accordingly. A very common response is one of frustration and anger, and sometimes even a desire for getting even for feeling left out. This is based on a seemingly irrational desire to blame others for not gratifying one's dependency needs. And the scapegoating behavior that may result may contribute to a very politicized organizational culture, creating problems of coordination because of interdepartmental rivalry.

Aggression, however, can also be turned inward, leading to the kind of extreme depressive reactions we saw in the case of Roberto Calvi. Substance abuse such as alcoholism or drug taking may accompany such reactions. Predictably, if such extreme responses to frustration of dependency needs continue, they can have dire consequences for the organization.

THE FEAR OF SUCCESS

In a society oriented toward success, failure is looked on as a catastrophe, and to some extent we all fear it. But while the fear of failure as a reactivating mechanism for feelings of insufficiency and incompetence is much more understandable, the

phenomenon known as the fear of success is more of a mystery (3). In fact, many years ago, Freud tried to demystify some of the dynamics behind this fear in an article called "Those Wrecked by Success"(4). He noted that some people become sick when a deeply rooted and long cherished desire comes to fulfilment. He gave as example a professor who cherished a wish to succeed his teacher. When eventually this wish came true and the individual succeeded his mentor, depression, feelings of self-depreciation, and work inhibition set in.

The explanation of this phenomenon seems to be that to some people success becomes symbolically equated with an "Oedipal triumph", a victory in doing better than the parents of childhood. This is particularly true for those individuals who have never satisfactorily resolved rivalrous feelings toward parents and siblings. If this is the case, to be successful now (and success is measured in many different ways such as power, love, money, etc), and to have tangible accomplishments, can turn into a pyrrhic victory. It is something which is wanted but it is also something to be feared.

At the heart of the problem is the fact that success makes one stand out and be noticed. Being in such a position may arouse the envy and resentment of others. Thus, retaliation will be feared from the one with whom the person is competing. Hence - and we have to remember this is usually an unconscious, symbolic process - success may be transformed into some kind of hostile act against these "shadows" from the past. Guilt and retribution are to be

expected.

Thus we can observe how in certain instances leaders who suffer from the fear of success may do very well until they reach a top position. Then, suddenly, having been finally successful in their aggressive strivings, they may become anxious, deprecate their achievements, and even engage in self-defeating behavior.

Ex-President Nixon seems to be a good case in point here - a political leader who, it seemed, unconsciously needed to fail in order to appease his guilt. Much has already been made of how his family, composed of a myth-making mother who would create a reality suited to her needs, and a rather brutal father who would use physical means to obtain obedience, affected his particular way of acting. Of course with the advantage of knowing his background, some of Nixon's actions seem less remarkable. Here was a leader who demonstrated great political acumen, and who also possessed a remarkable ability to exploit the baser needs of the American public. His vicious anti-Communist campaigns and his investigation of the Alger Hiss affair are examples of these abilities. He was also a leader who had the strength and ability to turn major defeats into mere setbacks. His personal background seems to have made him very hardy at withstanding the rough-and-tumble of the political arena. But in spite of all his talents and his eventual achievements, Nixon repeatedly managed "to snatch defeat out of the jaws of victory". We can see this in the way he resorted to easily discovered small lies when talking to the press, in his secret slush fund in the 1952 Presidential

Campaign, and finally, of course, in the Watergate cover-up.

Nixon is an example of a person where dangerous images in his inner world led to self-defeating behavior. Other psychological scenarios, however, can be found, although the final outcome is usually the same. For instance, there is the individual who unconsciously equates success (in whatever form) with giving in to others, usually the parents. Vicariously, the parents may have wanted to gratify their own narcissistic needs through the accomplishments of their children. Parents who do this put a formidable pressure on the child to succeed. Some children, however, may rebel against being made into a "proxy", against having to participate in "mission impossible". In an otherwise inexplicable way they fall back on self-defeating behavior and self-sabotage the moment they become successful.

Then there are some leaders who may undo their success for the "simple" reason that their own dependency needs have become too pressing. Again, this is usually not a conscious act. What seems to happen, however, is that for some leaders the stress of being in a position of power may be just too much. Success brings greater responsibilities and a change in comfortable routines. Also, symbolically, success may mean the annihilation of one's old identity. Some leaders find it very hard to handle these changes. Thus the deliberate invitation of failure is actually a cry for help.

STAYING ON COURSE

I have described some of the more problematic sides of leadership. A number of the psychological forces which can negatively affect everyone in a leadership position have been depicted. Frequently many of these forces will be brought to bear simultaneously. Leaders who cannot withstand them will be the ones who cannot manage. They may lose touch with reality and may be swept away by paranoia and depression, the real banes of leadership. Fortunately, most leaders have sufficient strength of character and adequate coping abilities to prevent this from happening: most have the inner resources to manage the new pressures that leadership brings.

Whatever the final outcome, however, we should not forget that these forces are a reality and are ever present. Everyone in a position of leadership should be aware of them and should be able to identify potential signs of trouble. To be prepared against the darker side of leadership some of the following questions become appropriate:

- How accessible am I?
- How do I react to bad news or criticism from a subordinate?
- Do I feel able to discuss any problems/ideas with colleagues?
- Do I think of subordinates in terms of those who are "with" and those who are "against" me?
- How realistic is my vision of the company's future? Does a

great discrepancy exist between my own and others' points of view?

- Am I willing to accept responsibility if things go wrong?
- Am I quick to take offense and feel treated unfairly or experience a great need to blow my own horn?

In considering these questions you should not forget that the ability to change fantasy into reality, given the power you have as a leader, can be like a siren's call and may cause a metamorphosis as soon as you attain that position. The potential for losing touch with reality and irrational behavior is dormant in all of us.

Paradoxically enough, occasionally it is exactly this irrational quality that is needed to make some leaders effective. Paranoid reactions and visionary experiences may feed very well into certain types of situations: one-sided behavior and overreaction may be exactly what is needed. And many political and religious leaders have acted just this way. We only have to think of political leaders such as Stalin or the Ayatollah Khomeini. However, in spite of what may have been an initially enthusiastic reception, there is a dark side to this behavior. To evoke regressive tendencies in others and provoke aggression is like being the sorcerer's apprentice. What is set into motion may be impossible to stop.

And this cautionary note - granted on a lesser scale - is also true in business situations. Here, however, it may be somewhat

easier to set up safeguards against the excesses of leadership. As a leader in present day society you have to deal with the government, unions, or banks or other stakeholders which may take on the role of countervailing power helping to keep you in touch with reality. In many large organizations you will inherit an organizational structure with different checks and balances in the form of distribution of key policy decisions over a number of individuals and various agencies which will circumscribe your behavior. Moreover, in large organizations, organizational processes find their own momentum, being resistant to dramatic change. In such organizations there is a high degree of inertia. Social systems have their own way of providing a safety belt for individuals through their structure.

Apart from the various external checks on your actions which may prevent these irrational manifestations from coming to the fore, you yourself as a leader can take preventive action. Encouraging frank feedback by outsiders such as external directors, bankers, and consultants is one way of preventing these regressive forces from gaining the upper hand. Individuals from outside the organization usually possess a very different frame of reference and will be much less entangled and blinded by the existing organizational dynamics. They can provide more of an overall view and warn about potential sources of trouble. Board members in particular can play a critical role. Selecting a strong, independent board, which is really willing to take on its auditing role rather than just being a rubber stamp, is one of the best ways of keeping an organization on course and preventing it from

losing track of reality.

Another useful countervailing force can be participation in top executive training programs. These can provide a nonthreatening environment where you can discuss your working experience with colleagues and professionals exposed to similar problems. Such situations will enhance reality testing. Mutual comparison of potential problem areas may provide you with an "aha" experience, insight being the first step toward constructive change.

Leaders and their subordinates are like partners at a dance. The experience can be very exhilarating, but the dancers can also fall over each others' feet. Both parties carry a heavy responsibility for the interchange to work. To make this possible, willingness is needed to listen, and respect is required for the other's point of view. This requires a certain amount of self-knowledge and a preparedness to reflect on one's actions. Empathic listening becomes here a sine qua non to really understand the leader-subordinate dialogue. Thus in spite of all the countervailing forces mentioned, in the end it is the relationship of equity, consistency and trust making for frank interchange between you and your followers which will be the strongest force in preventing regressive behavior in leadership. And given the nature of power in organizations, making this happen is the real challenge.

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