



The Human Dimension

THE LEADER WITHIN

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"We help both people and productivity flourish by developing a positive culture of shared leadership."

We find improved performance is the reward for your investing in people.

The emphasis in THE LEADER WITHIN is on the changes and growth we make within ourselves, as leadership is basically a personal growth experience over time.

'For things to change first I must change.'

Truth-telling inside your organization:

Jack Welch, the highly regarded former CEO of General Electric, writes from his many years of experience in his book 'Winning':

"Forget outside competition when your own worst enemy is the way you communicate with one another internally".

Authentic and honest internal communication results in better, faster decisions and actions. It also builds a culture of trust and collaboration where opposing views are debated and more effective solutions and innovations are created.

In reality, however, there is often a distinct lack of authentic and honest communication inside most organizations. This is not necessarily deliberate or intentionally dishonest. It's often in the many moments each day where we think one thing, but say something different; where we have an idea that may be of value, but we hold back and say nothing; where we are called upon to give an honest opinion, but decide to say what is easier or what we think others want to hear.

Changing our behaviour in these areas and becoming more authentic could revolutionize the way you interact with your colleagues, resulting in a significant increase in efficiency, collaboration and trust. Ignoring it is likely to put you at a serious disadvantage in terms of realizing the full potential of your people. But what's the real possibility of changing individual, team and whole organization behaviour so that candor rules and the business wins?

The answer is it can be done, but of course it's not easy. It's not easy because there are many good reasons why we sometimes withhold the truth at work.

Most of these reasons boil down to three fundamental underlying causes: socialization, fear and lack of skills.

Socialization

We are socialized from childhood to be 'polite' and to try to manage how other people feel. There is a code of conduct that goes with politeness that demands that we 'lie' in order to avoid potentially hurting someone's feelings. For example, if someone asks what we think of their appearance or wardrobe we might answer in a bland or non-committal way, which hides our real response and true thoughts/feelings. This is a small example, but we are brought up with hundreds of such life examples where we have 'learned' to automatically withhold the truth in an attempt to be polite and take care of how others' might feel.

How we are socialized strongly influences how we behave as adults in the workplace. An all too common example is that the whole truth is rarely told in performance appraisals, seriously hindering both trust-building and professional development.

We do not have to go through life 'blurting out' the truth at every possible opportunity. It is important though that we re-examine some of our assumptions and conventions around how we communicate with our co-workers in order to build trust and get business success including how we speak the truth.

After all, how much real trust can there be between colleagues who do not tell each other the whole truth or 'blurt out' the truth with no respect for who they are speaking to?

And how much business success can be built between people who feel the need to withhold their views and opinions in case it upsets the 'apple cart'? If we learn to say the truth with respect and with integrity, then people can begin to hear the truth and begin to change if that is required.

Fear

The second fundamental reason why truth telling does not pervade most organizational cultures is that we fear the consequences, often with good reason. If you are working in a highly political culture with people you don't trust, you need to be both skilled and strategic about how you use the truth (you also need to ask yourself how much longer you want to work in such a culture!).

For most people, however, the fear is more about the imagined negative impact. Not only, we imagine, might we provoke conflict or pain, but we might also be perceived as abrasive, socially unskilled or just plain weird. One thing's for sure, in an environment where truth-telling is not the norm, we would certainly stand out by speaking frankly and many of us would prefer to keep our 'head down' rather than present a stationary target.

With our clients we find there is often a lot of fantasy around the imagined negative consequences of telling others the truth. It's important to work out when our fears are grounded in reality and we need to behave carefully and strategically; and when our fears are imaginary and simply blocking effective communication with our colleagues.

Another common fear is that we lack the skills to both deliver our message directly and to manage the 'push-back' or emotional response it is likely to evoke from others.

Lack of Skills

In an ideal world, just telling the truth with the intention of working collaboratively with others would be enough. It wouldn't matter that we might deliver our message clumsily or fail to manage the response quite as well as we might have liked. However, in the real world, where we need to develop long-term, trusting relationships with our colleagues, good intentions are not enough.

Developing the skills to present contentious opinions, deliver difficult feedback and manage resistance, strong emotion and conflict not only help us to influence effectively through truth-telling, but also give us the confidence to do it more often. If you currently lack these skills, or think you do, it makes absolute sense that you would avoid truth telling in potentially difficult situations. But avoidance is not an effective long-term strategy for you, your team or your organization if you want to bring about change or achieve sustainable success.

Getting the hidden agendas or difficult topics out and onto the table. A particularly gifted senior executive we are working with recently demonstrated the effectiveness of truth telling. In a team meeting with his direct reports he opened up some difficult matters to speak about and put them on the table for all to see. These are not his exact words, but it went something like this:

"Since the amalgamation, we have been working in a highly pressurized and stressful environment. In January we are all going to receive a substantial bonus. I know that some of you will have already decided to take the money and leave. My guess is that others of you are considering it. We all know this, but we've never talked about it and it's important because we can't plan effectively for the New Year without this information.

I am not going to judge any of you in any way. If you decide to leave I quite understand and I will wish you well; if you have decided to stay, but only for a certain period, that's OK too. But we do need to know where we stand in order to make good decisions and plan effectively. There will be no negative consequences to telling the truth here. What I'd like to do is go around the table and ask each of you to tell us what your plans are and how you are thinking about it. I'll start."

This was a great example of truth telling that led to increased candor, trust and effective decision-making and planning. One of the reasons that it worked so well was that this senior executive makes a habit of speaking frankly and

honestly with the people he works with. People trust him and always know where they stand. He is one of the most successful and effective managers in his organization.

Truth telling - vital to winning.

Jack Welch identifies truth telling in organizations as "*vital to winning*" and the lack of it as "*The biggest dirty little secret in business*".

"Lack of candour basically blocks smart ideas, fast action, and good people contributing all the stuff they've got. It's a killer."

Developing an organizational culture where truth-telling is encouraged and rewarded; where you demonstrate honesty and plain-speaking at every opportunity; where you talk-up the advantages and successes of such behaviour; and where you develop the skills to enable people to communicate honestly, respectfully and effectively are all positive actions towards reaping the advantages of truth-telling in business.

If your organization is one that believes people are your most important asset and potentially your biggest competitive advantage, you'd be crazy not to develop skilled and honest internal communication that enables this potential to be realized. It can be done, and fortunately you don't need to be Jack Welch to achieve it.

Acknowledgement for the concepts in this article are attributed to Lynn Harris who holds a Masters Degree in Organizational Development and has over 10 years experience as an organizational development consultant and executive coach. The original article appeared in <http://www.linkageinc.com/>
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Call to Action:

Our daughter Kalinda sent us this and I thought I would pass it on to you. It runs for around two minutes and is a positive and uplifting motivational piece with some restful photos alongside the words. In a world of low level background fears about many aspects of life and anxiety, apprehension and conflict for so many, we need to be reminded of what is good, worthwhile and beautiful.

Click on this link: www.mayyoublessedmovie.com - and sit back and enjoy the reminders of what really matters in life.

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