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Paying it Forward
Leading with Purpose
with Chief Randy R. Bruegman, (Ret)

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The Rhythm of Leadership

My hobby is playing drums, which I have been doing since I was 12. While I don't profess to be a great drummer, it has always been a passion of mine, and I have found there is a correlation to leadership.

When playing the drums, there are times when you just get in the groove; the playing seems easier, the precision is there, the music becomes a natural extension of your effort, you are relaxed enjoying the flow of the song... and then you find yourself out of sync with the rest of the band.

Why does that happen? I believe it is because you become so relaxed in the effort that you become complacent. I have found that can also happen in organizations as well. Think about a time when you were leading your team, and everything seemed to be in sync. Great team members, everyone gets along, your projects are getting done and/or business profit has never been better... and then the wheels fall off the bus! Why does it happen? Oftentimes

it is because we become so self-satisfied that our efforts lag, we become careless, or we are so self-content that we become lazy.

Complacency

The definition of complacency is a feeling of contentment or self-satisfaction, often combined with a lack of awareness of pending trouble or controversy. In any

profession, complacency is easy to encounter. Organizational complacency kills. It will always find the vulnerabilities in the comfort that often rests within the culture of the organization, and when organizational change is attempted, complacency often kills the effort. While organizational complacency can be attributed to those small changes that are left unattended or simply ignored over time, it can also be driven by success. When an organization thinks what it is doing is so good that they fail to keep up with changing landscape around them, bad things usually happen.

We have had many examples of national companies that became complacent and are no longer around; Blockbuster, Kodak, K-Mart, Toys R Us, to name a few, but there

have been many others both large and small, and many a result of the owner(s) or leadership becoming complacent and enamored with their past success and/or oblivious to the dangers that were lying ahead for their organization. When complacency becomes the leadership team benchmark, often the entire organization will follow. Complacency is an organizational cancer, and, if left untreated, it will suck the life out of an organization and its people.

Complacency often creates an organizational culture that has a limited perspective of what is occurring in their environment, and their failure to notice the incremental changes that are occurring around them leads them to be unable to react when needed. The reason? The organizational culture never sensed the existing threats. This analogy has been referred to as the boiled frog syndrome, a story that is descriptive of what organizations experience when they become complacent about what is occurring within and around them. The boiled frog syndrome is an illustrative story of what often occurs to individuals and organizations when small incremental changes go unnoticed. If a frog is placed in a pan of hot water, it will immediately jump out. More often than not, it will survive the experience.

If you put the same frog in a pan of room-temperature water and then heat the water very slowly, the frog will stay in the pan until it boils to death. The frog could have jumped out, but the change happened so slowly that it did not realize the danger it was in. So, what killed the frog? Many would say the boiling water, but the reality is the frog was killed by his inability to decide he needed to jump. The story is widely used as a metaphor to illustrate the inability of an organization and people to react to significant changes that happen gradually.

“Complacency is an organizational cancer, and, if left untreated, it will suck the life out of an organization and its people.”

This highlights the need for leaders people to be aware and respond to gradual changes that take place. If these small changes are left unattended to, they will lead to organizational disruption or in some cases, failure of the company. What lessons may be taken from organizations that failed to adapt to their changing environment and are no longer in business? Here are a few:

Don't Reward the Status Quo: If you embrace stability over innovation your organization or the team that you are leading, you will always do what has always been done. This creates an inherent inertia that will severely limit the capacity to change.

Culture Eats Change For Breakfast: Culture is a key factor in a team or organizations ability to adapt quickly and make change. This is often another by-product of organizational complacency. Failure to invest to the development of building a culture that can adapt quickly, that is not afraid of trying new ideas and concepts, and understands that sustainability is reliant on the ability to keep up with the changing environment around them.

Focus on Internal Analysis vs. External Research: This is often a result of an organization that is over confident and has lost sight of their customers. "Sales are steady so why should we worry?" or "I work for the government so why should I care about the customer?" - "We are the only game in town." This myopic view will always lead an organization to either fail or have a negative impact on their service delivery.

Foundational Interest Can Be A Major Impediment to Change: When organizational complacency is the norm, foundational interests can take priority. Entrenched employee groups who wish to maintain the status quo can prevent the organization from taking any actions at all, an out of touch leadership team that thinks everything is fine, when it is not, or the organizational bureaucracy of rules and regulations are such, that it severely limits the organization's ability to quickly address an issue, In each case, these foundational interest may prevent them from recognizing or addressing an issue that can puts them at risk.

Don't Wait To Innovate: Complacency always develops a comfort zone. When you are warm and toasty, just like the frog, it is exceedingly difficult to make the leap out. Being in that comfort zone will often lead many organizations to fail to recognize that technology, changing customer demands, and their sole focus on internal issues creates vulnerabilities for their organization. Innovation is never the outcome of a complacent organization or team, and yet innovation is the means by which to sustain the viability of any team or organization in the future.

How Can You Avoid Complacency?

Whether it is you as an individual, your organization, or the team you are leading, the road of complacency never leads to excellence, but always leaves you with a loss of competitive advantage in advancement for yourself, in revenue for your company, and in retaining the best talent for your team. So, what is the antidote to prevent this from occurring?

Engage in continuous improvement; it is the best way to overcome legacy thinking, (that is the way we have always done it).

Have a vision of where you are going and have a developed plan that supports getting there.

Reward innovation. One of the best ways to not become complacent is to reward the exact opposite behavior in your organization. Make it part of your DNA.



Invest in developing the knowledge and skills needed by your team to achieve the long-term vision and that promotes continuous improvement for them

Learn from your mistakes. In the fire and emergency services we call these tailboard discussions. After every emergency incident, it is common to gather around the tailboard of on the apparatus and discuss what went right, what went poorly, and what lessons can we learn so we can do it better next time. That should be done throughout the organization as well. Your best teacher is often an experience that you have had, but if not used in that way, it will not be a learning tool, it will just be an event. Use it as a learning tool, a great way to never become complacent.

Chief B's Key Leadership Takeaways

Having the honor of speaking to great leaders in their profession in **The Leadership Crucible Podcast**, we make notes on the key leadership takeaways that are discussed. Will share those with you in hopes that it help you to reflect on your own leadership style, but also to provide some potential talking points that you can discuss with your team. Doing so is a great way to understand your teams, gain perspective on topics, helps you to gain a deeper understanding of how your individual team members think. It is an excellent way to build you team.

- ✓ Make excellence the norm.
- ✓ Respect the people around you.
- ✓ You have to find passion. When you can feed that passion, you won't believe what you can do!
- ✓ Don't spend time being upset if you make a mistake. Come together and figure out how to correct it. Don't take time away from the positives, correct the mistake and move on.
- ✓ New ideas and organizations often have leaders that want to be part of the success story.
- ✓ We are all part of something bigger than ourselves...whatever you believe that is.
- ✓ Write down your lessons learned. Keep it simple for people so they can refer back to the takeaways.
- ✓ At the end of the day, if you stay inspired and work to inspire others, you can't go wrong.
- ✓ It's not just about keeping your eye on the ball, but keeping a broad perspective and investing in those who stand behind and beside you in your pursuit of excellence.



Readers are Leaders

I believe that, to be a good leader, one must be on a continuous quest to gain more knowledge. The leadership benefits of reading are wide-ranging. John Coleman's article in the Harvard Business Review, "For Those Who Want To Lead, Read," highlights that the leadership benefits of reading are wide-ranging. Evidence suggests that reading can improve intelligence and lead to innovation and insight, and, for example, some studies have shown that reading makes you smarter through "a larger vocabulary and more world knowledge in addition to the abstract reasoning skills."

Reading has many benefits, but it is underappreciated as an essential component of leadership development. To that end, we'll provide a few suggested titles for you to consider reading.

Leaders Eat Last by Simon Sinek

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People
by Steven Covey

Managing Transitions by William Bridges

Our Iceberg is Melting by John Kotter

Leader Shift by John Maxwell

Good to Great by Jim Collins

