



Leadership Detox

Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals." 1 Cor 15:33

Leadership Behavior: Leaders are better together.

Norman Cousins tells the following story: Once during a football game, a doctor at the first aid station treated five people for what he suspected might be food poisoning. Since their symptoms were similar, he tried to track down what they had in common. He soon discovered that all five people had bought drinks from a particular concession stand at the stadium.

The physician wanted to do the responsible thing, so he requested that the game's announcer advise people in the stadium to avoid buying drinks from the particular vendor because of the possibility of food poisoning. Before long, more than two hundred people complained of food poisoning symptoms. Nearly half the people's symptoms were so severe that they were taken to the hospital.

The story doesn't end there, however. After a little more detective work, it was discovered that the five original victims had eaten tainted potato salad from one particular deli on the way to the game. When the other "sufferers" found out that the drinks in the stadium were safe, they experienced miraculous recoveries.

As a team and organization it is our aim to succeed in fulfilling our mission. We have some of the best talent I've ever seen assembled within a local church. However, talent alone doesn't guarantee success. It's true, you can't win a game without a great team, however, you can still lose with one. Winning requires more than talent. It also requires a winning attitude.

We've previously learned that culture wins 100% of the time. What if you have a toxic culture? Then toxic wins, 100% of the time. This is a reflection of John Maxwell's 8th law of leadership— The Law of the Bad Apple: Rotten attitudes ruin a team. As leaders we would do well to learn it.

Four thoughts on toxic attitudes.

1. AN ATTITUDE HAS THE POWER TO LOWER OR LIFT

I remind my kids often that "Attitude determines Altitude." Their attitude towards school, sports or even one another has the ability to lower or lift our expectations for each day. When they wake up with a cheerful attitude, their work is done on time and their grades are excellent. However, when the morning gets off to a rough start, it makes for a long day. **That's the power of attitude!**

Our attitude will lower or lift the environment around us. A positive attitude is the greatest asset you have, far greater than talent, ability and opportunity. With a winning attitude you can't lose, with a toxic attitude you can't win.

A toxic leader is a leader with a consistent bad attitude that lowers the morale of the entire team.

To be clear, this doesn't necessarily mean they are a bad person. Toxic leaders can make great contributions. However, they also detract from your efforts to accomplish your goals. If left unchecked, they drag down the entire team and ultimately will guarantee defeat.

2. AN ATTITUDE IS CONTAGIOUS

The only thing more contagious than a good attitude is a bad attitude - John Maxwell

During the first half of the twentieth century, many sports experts believed that no runner could run a mile in less than four minutes. And for a long time they were right. But then on May 6, 1954, British runner and university student Roger Bannister ran a mile in 3 minutes 59.4 seconds during a meet in Oxford. Less than two months later, another runner, Australian John Landy, also broke the four-minute barrier. Then suddenly dozens and then hundreds of others broke it. Why? Because the best runners' attitudes changed. They began to adopt the mindset and beliefs of their peers. Bannister's attitude and actions compounded when exposed to others. His attitude spread. Today, every world-class runner who competes at that distance can run a mile in less than four minutes. Attitudes are contagious!

The greatest leaders understand that attitude matters more than even competence. In most cases, a person with a good attitude can be "coached up" and develop the skills to get the job done. A person with competence who possesses a bad attitude can be like cancer to the whole organization. Put several people together with bad attitudes and they can totally sabotage the mission.

Attitude is a choice. Don't have a bad one. Don't tolerate bad attitudes if you are in leadership. Failure to address inappropriate attitudes will prevent you from maximizing your leadership.

3. A TOXIC ATTITUDE ALWAYS HAS THE SAME "TELL"

At the heart of a toxic attitude is always the same tell-tale sign, the sin of self. You hear it in the language, "I can't do this." "I don't like this." "It's not my fault." "I prefer this another way." "If we did things my way..." "I told them this wouldn't work." Just like the sin of pride caused satan to fall from heaven, the sin of self brings down an individual as well as anyone in their sphere of influence.

Common Warning Signs:

- **Unwilling to own mistakes.** Do they quickly offer excuses and never admit fault?
- **Unforgiveness.** Do you hear the tones of bitterness, resentment and offense that spring up from a heart that is unwilling to let go and forgive the past?
- **Jealousy.** Do they celebrate others success or do they compare themselves or criticize in order to cut down others?

- **Self-centeredness.** Does it seem that “I”, “me”, and “mine” are their most favorite pronouns?
- **Critical spirit.** Do they point out problems and never offer solutions?
- **Take all the credit.** Do they share the credit for success with others, or do they make a corporate win their win?

4. DETOXING LEADERSHIP

When you observe a toxic attitude or behavior on your team, you cannot leave it unaddressed. It will grow like an invasive weed that will overtake even the most productive garden. Toxic attitudes do not root themselves out. You have to pull them out!

Points on Detoxing Leadership:

- People always project on the outside how they feel on the inside. Attitude is really about how a person is. That overflows into how they act. Use this as a window into their life and approach from a position of empathy.
- Begin with yourself. The things I notice the most in others are often the very things I deal with in myself. As a leader you are responsible to set the cultural temperature.
- Care enough of confront. Leaders often shy away from confrontation. However, avoiding a necessary conversation is not caring. As a leader, care enough to have the tough conversation. And remember, the moment you decide not to deal with a problem, you just became the problem.
- Point to our culture. When you keep our culture, vision, values, mission, method front and center, it provides the framework for a productive conversation.
- Share what you’ve observed, but take the high road. Assume the best in the other and be open to the possibility that your perception could be wrong.
- Correct the behavior not the person. Remember, most people are decent and have a desire to do good. It’s the behavior you want to bring attention to and offer them a chance to correct.
- Hold them accountable and expect the best. If they change, you may very well have won a valuable team member. If they refuse to change, dismiss them.

Questions:

- 1) How would you score the cultural health of your leadership teams at this moment? What needs to change to improve?
- 2) Who on your team exemplifies a winning attitude and helps lift everyone around them? Think about how you can honor them and reinforce that behavior on your team.
- 3) Do you have a toxic leader or behavior that you know needs to be addressed? How will you deal with it this week?