

Waning Influence

By Michael Laff

Sitting in stadium-sized corner offices, many executives evoke an aura that they can solve any problem in a single conversation.

Yet for an overwhelming majority of leaders, addressing dysfunctional behavior in the office is the headache that won't go away, and they acknowledge being powerless to change it.

Shifting blame, gossiping, and harboring territorial attitudes are three of the most destructive behaviors in the workplace, according to a recent survey conducted by Joseph Glenny, a Provo, Utah-based author and management consultant. Equally discouraging is the finding that 64 percent of leaders do little or nothing to change the pattern.

"Leadership and change management are such vacuous terms that they rob us of an objective measure of management accountability," he says. "Most leaders have no clearly articulated strategy for influencing changes in behavior."

In contrast to obtaining the required technical credentials in medicine or technology, the measurement of a successful leader is elusive. As Glenny explains, there is no shock when a leader can only pause when asked how he attempts to influence the behavior of others.

"It's not about making decisions," he says. "It's not about being the smartest person in the room. It's about being able to influence the behavior of other people in the room."

Glenny, author of *Influencer: The Power to Change Anything*, says an organization as large as Lockheed Martin was able to reverse some of its more unproductive behaviors in nine months. Instead of making a laundry list of ongoing problems, he suggests

listing the top three or four problems that are most destructive. The next step, often the most difficult, calls for leaders to identify what aspects of the organization, such as its management structure or isolation among departments, contribute to negative behavior.

Too often when confronted with chronic problems such as turf wars between departments, executives reach for a familiar "off the shelf" solution like day-long training sessions or simply delegate the task to HR and training staff. Many problems continue internally for the simple reason that employees have no opportunity to talk about them.

"It becomes the norm, like lower back pain," Glenny says. "Then leaders look for ways to deal with it. They are overstaffed to compensate for absenteeism or they have too many quality control people."

Michael Laff is senior associate editor of T+D; mlaff@astd.org.

The BIG Number

90%

of leaders say dysfunctional behaviors have become acceptable in the workplace.

Top 3 Consequences of Bad Behavior

>> **What negative impacts does bad behavior create in the workplace?**

Lower employee satisfaction . . . 24%

Lower productivity 19%

Decreased quality 16%

Source: VitalSmarts.com





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