

Extreme Behaviors

Learn to lead through insight.



By Vivian Amar and Judith E. Glaser

HEALTHY CULTURES, LIKE HEALTHY people, emanate positive energy, feel good to customers, and draw us to want to work in them and with them. When a culture is healthy, people work together synergistically to achieve goals. People feel included and valued, and everyone learns and grows. It's a place we want to work, a place we're proud of.

Reorganization, restructuring, and downsizing create environments of fear, worry, and stress, where people feel they need to protect themselves. Leaders can reduce stress and build support by monitoring their extreme behaviors.

Learning how to listen for signals of cultural health enables leaders to "early identify" problems. As leaders become aware of distress signals, they can transform negative stress into positive energy.

Eight Extreme Practices

Here are eight extreme practices that managers need to transform:

1. Leading through silence. Some organizations appear to be emotionally deaf and blind, and yet, silence talks loudly—silence about decisions and policies, about the future, about where specific job functions and the business are heading.

2. Left-brain management. This refers to a style of leadership where executives and experts seem to be compulsive consumers of reports, memos and workshops. Meanwhile, employees—the ones confronted each day with the real issues—struggle to create networks and relationships so they can get the job done.

3. Management by power. Many executives adopt forms of behavior that are irrational—the product of unresolved personal conflicts. They are largely unaware of the impact of their personality, values, beliefs, myths, fears, and taboos on the leadership style and culture. As a result,

they create pyramids that prevent them from facing outside realities.

4. Hierarchical self-centeredness. This leads to management by heliocentrism, and produces isolated managers who spend much of their time trying to justify their positions. They demand to be seen by their hierarchy in their quest for recognition. Many top managers pretend they are two persons, and that personal life and organizational life are not linked.

5. Leading by hierarchical distance. We have adopted a new style: email and post-it management. Little yellow stickers or numerous urgent emails, are replacing human contact. And yet endless meetings are still held. Elites are so firmly schooled in



rationality that they forget that relationships are at the heart of life and business.

6. Leading by haziness. More people wonder whether management is aware they even exist. Their anxiety is heightened when they are confronted with vague communication and unclear messages. Some companies lack a clear idea as to what they are supposed to be doing, when and with whom. Without direction, people can't sustain performance.

7. Leading by beliefs and taboos. This is the hallmark of those who try to maintain their credibility by concealing their areas of ignorance. But today's employees know full well when their superiors are in the dark. The number of taboos involved is also impressive. Few people have the courage to speak out in terms of connections to others (meaning, friendship, fear, desire, hope, love). Most

people simply react in terms of survival.

8. Leading by miracle strategies. We denounce the epidemic of recipes—the result of the incapacity of executives to anticipate and prepare the future—that claim so many casualties. Downsizing requires less imagination, vision, and anticipation—qualities executives are paid for.

Leading Through Insight

Reorganizing, restructuring, and downsizing often lead to more stress and less performance, because people wind up with greater work loads and become tactical. Strategy implementation becomes a matter of chance, not planning.

When leaders are dealing with numbers, rather than with people, they often become practitioners of managerial extremes (I-centric). No one dares to question their behaviors. When extreme behaviors dominate the leadership, fatality reigns. You sense that you're stating openly what many people experience but avoid mentioning for fear of losing their jobs.

Most organizations are run by men and women of power, rarely by leaders. Men and women of power serve themselves at any cost, while leaders live in a state of positive contribution—at the service of the collective interest. People of power build pyramids to control and divide intelligence, information and people, while the leader develops networks and multiplies synergies and knowledge. We-centric leaders develop in others the inner power of leadership.

We have identified other key drivers to performance. They include:

- Having shared vision and values.
- The courage to prepare the future.
- Consistency between words and deeds.
- Managing individual and team performance—the "I" inside of the "We."
- Recognizing the value of each individual's intelligence and potential.
- Maintaining the team's cohesion.
- Developing a culture of co-responsibility, instead of scapegoating
- Placing the client at the center.

The climate of mutual support motivates people. Managing by values enables leaders to sustain performance. **LE**

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ACTION: Create a we-centric culture.