

Leadership: Lazy Leadership & LCD Policy

DON'T LET THE LOWEST COMMON DENOMINATOR DRIVE

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Executives in fast growing companies must make good business decisions and build the capacity and culture for others to do the same. It may seem that too often your decisions put out fires that exist due to the decisions of others or should be put out by the decisions of others. Some of your decisions and actions may enhance the ability of others to step-up and some may stifle the right decisions being made at the right level.

Blanket Policies...

Sometimes they are the right solution. In other cases they may seem to make your job easier but there is a cost. It is tempting to simply make blanket policy hoping that it will solve a problem easily, quickly, and permanently. That approach is black or white – eliminates the need for any decision making on the part of subordinate managers and employees. Like the drill sergeant in Army Basic Training many years ago who said, "Boek, I didn't ask you to think. You're too dumb to think. I do all your thinking for you."

A Texas experience a few years ago reminds me of unintended consequences that can result from this approach in business.

I picked up the rental car in Dallas for a five hour drive northwest to the town of Childress Dad picked cotton there as a boy and I wanted to see the source of some of his childhood stories..

It is late morning. Three cups of coffee and over 150 miles have been consumed. A rest stop and updated directions are in order as this is pre-GPS. I spot the billboard logo of the well-known auto rental company whose car I am driving. Their office is under the sign.

The receptionist is polite as am I. She is, however, not able to provide the needed directions. She calls her supervisor from the back room. He provides directions. I am reoriented and understand the specific navigation trick necessary to get on the right road.

As our discussion concludes, I ask him to grant me access to the restroom door I am looking at, the one with the "No Public Restroom" sign. He states emphatically, "We do not have a public restroom. The facilities are for employees only." I reply, "Yes, I see the sign, but I am not the public. In fact, according to this card, now in my hand, I am not even a customer but a Preferred Customer. Would you agree that this designation should provide a preferred level of hospitality? He reluctantly agreed.



Back on the road I thought about how often business leaders make decisions, establish rules and procedures based on the behavior of the lowest common denominator. Someone vandalizes a restroom so the hospitality of a restroom becomes unavailable to customers. Some people shoplift so the majority of honest customers are treated like shoplifters, bad acting employees and customers cause lazy or frustrated leaders to make blanket policy that demotivates good employees and alienates customers. Beyond that a culture can develop where good smart managers are prevented from using their brains to make the right situational decisions. But then good smart leaders figure out how to do what's right in-spite of policies that are not right for the situation.

If you are a leader faced with creating the right level of stability in the chaos of fast growth, remember that entitlement philosophy and self-serving perceptions of "fairness" can march your business towards mediocrity.

"There is nothing more unjust than equal treatment of unequals"
(Aristotle or Thomas Jefferson)



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