

## Please say it isn't so! Managerial Mis-Steps During Times of Personnel Transition.

by Bob Schout

A manager's job is to support leadership decisions and shore up trust in leaders at all times, but especially during times of personnel or program/project transitions. As a coach, mediator and consultant I am often involved in sensitive personnel decision-making processes with my clients. None of those processes or decisions ever seem to be easy ones, because tenure, relationships, personalities, histories, institutional knowledge loss, and team dynamics are always involved.

What compounds the challenge of making sensitive personnel termination, management, hiring, and even promotion decisions, are the behaviors of leaders on the front-line or in middle/senior management positions. Managers must at all times, and especially during times of personnel conflict-changes-transitions, remain staunchly calm, mission-centered, objective, trusting, and respectful of decision-making criteria; keeping personnel feelings and relationships out of personnel matters. If they don't do this, and personal relationships and personalities trump objectivity in decision-making, then they create conflict and dissension; setting organizationally dangerous precedents which send messages that personal upsets (e.g., discord, hurt, etc.) or personal histories or relationships should be guiding factors in personnel decision-making.

1. **Placing personal relationships and personalities before professional principles**, discernment, assurance of personnel policy and practice protocols, and professional role-related behaviors.
2. **Allying with a staff member or one leader versus the leadership** of the organization.
3. **Stimulating nervousness and anxiety among leaders** by doubting them in public or private, and by dropping emotional hand grenades in their office and then departing.
4. **Listening to and spreading false innuendo and gossip.** It doesn't help when managers, themselves, are involved with, and perpetuating false innuendo about a leader's decision-making rationale – either through their silence when they hear gossip or innuendo, or vis-à-vis their actual participation in spreading innuendo.
5. **Jumping ship during a transition** (e.g., *instead of stewarding their teams and project through transitions to ensure stability, goal achievement and mission fulfillment, they*

*either leave, state that they will be leaving or threaten to leave...trying to leverage some power over a leader's decision-making).*

6. **Not engaging in emotionally intelligent interactions** with staff (*e.g., answering staff member's questions about 'what's next' with worrisome responses such as, "Oh my God, I really don't know" or "I have no idea but I think we're screwed."; walking around with an upset attitude or expression, etc.*)
7. **Asking leaders, or parties involved, for confidential information** about personnel decisions that cannot be released.
8. **Making assumptions after hearing a single side of any story**, from emotionally upset or angry personnel; assuming that the one side is the entire story, or even that the current circumstances surrounding a personnel decision represent the entire story.
9. **Blaming leaders, individually or collectively, for mis-managing situations** without themselves having been privy to all aspects of a situation.
10. **Talking out of turn to clients-customers-community members** and promoting either drama or victim-mentality trauma within the organization and client-customer-community base.

**All of these behaviors occur, of course, because either the managers:**

- Have not dealt with their *grief and loss* about people, positions or projects.
- Have never learned about *leadership decision-making* and *problem-solving processes*.
- Have never learned about *personnel management* laws, policy, protocols, processes, or about why and upon what basis personnel decisions should be made.
- Cannot objectively *separate their feelings and relationships* from organizational-legal-personnel decision-making criteria and processes.

- Have never *personally matured as leaders*, thus allowing their gut reactions to drive them instead of allowing their professional role responsibilities and leadership principles to guide them.
- Simply feel at-a-loss for answers, solutions, communication, forward-planning, and change management.

**So, if you're a manager who is faced with tough personnel decisions and transitions please keep a couple of things in mind.**

**First**, own your role as a leader. You are a steward of the organization. Your focus should always be on mission-stability-growth-fact-based processes. Getting sucked into drama is not part of your job description.

**Secondly**, use the challenging personnel circumstances to literally grow as a leader and consider the legacy that you want to leave. Do you want to be known as a 'nice person who always advocated for personalities and friendships, or as a true leader who always placed principles and organizational stability and success ahead of personal feelings?

**Thirdly**, seize the actual opportunities that are always present within personnel transition processes so that you can re-set relationships, review standards, disseminate factual information-rationale, reinforce expectations and policies, determine new types of criteria-qualifications-interviewing questions for new hires and all roles/positions, etc. There are so many opportunities within a personnel transition process.

**Finally**, remember that you are a leader and that leaders support other leaders. They don't abandon or absolve themselves from supporting senior leaders during tough times. Your objectivity and support for leadership itself (not just for the personalities who happen to be in senior leader roles) is part of your job description and leadership responsibilities.

Use the list of 10 mis-steps as a personal accountability checklist. Then use the bullet-pointed items at the top of this page as part of your developmental planning guide. Most of all, remember that you are a leader, not just a manager of projects-people-partnerships-programs. You are a leader. It is during times of drama and personnel transition, that leaders show what they are made of. Show it.

Please contact [info@powerskillsinternational.com](mailto:info@powerskillsinternational.com) for written permission to reprint or share in any form.