

The wrong track: Loyalty versus complicity



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It's a situation that unfortunately we all almost certainly encounter at least once during the course of our career. We become convinced that the organization is headed down the wrong track. We no longer support the direction that leadership is prompting us.

Obviously, by its very nature, change involves discomfort. That's why strong leaders spend so much time communicating when they are leading change. They are clear on what problem(s) they are trying to solve. They try to remove as many of the unknowns associated with the future state as possible. They also define what's in it for all participants.

Strong leaders cultivate an atmosphere of open, healthy debate. That means they are good listeners, open to questions, concerns and suggestions regarding the change. Those fortunate enough to work in such an environment have a responsibility to share their concerns when given the opportunity.

But what about those situations where the person in charge is either unwilling to take input or quickly brushes it aside? When do we put our head down and become the loyal soldier and when do we take a stand?

A key distinction in my mind is whether the point of disagreement is one involving strategy or principle.

Occasionally, truly visionary leaders no doubt cause great consternation with major shifts in direction. That's to be expected.

Think of the hand wringing that must have accompanied ground-shaking strategic shifts during the past couple of decades at Apple and IBM, and more recently at Lego. Although ground shaking, those shifts turned out more than OK. Obviously, major strategic pivots can and occasionally do result in epic failures (remember New Coke?).

In situations regarding a strategic change in di-

rection, my experience is that it's worth giving the change a fighting chance. Given the value of hindsight, I can confidently say that a couple of strategic changes that I initially struggled with were indeed necessary and ultimately resulted in a much better organization.

For example, adapting the strategy of Lean with smaller batch sizes and leaders pushing decisions down as far as possible in the organization was so outside of my sphere of experience, that I initially struggled with it when introduced 30 years ago. Today my consulting business focuses on helping organizations with that same strategy.

Disputes about principle are another matter.

It's not OK to blindly follow when organizational or personal principles are being challenged. In such cases, it's best to find a trusted and objective sounding board within the organization to ensure one is reading the situation correctly.

I emphasize "within the organization" because they will have a much better perspective than someone outside that will rely

solely on our biased summary of the situation. It's also important to choose someone from outside of our echo chamber, someone who perhaps sees the world a bit differently than we do. During the course of my career, a sage mentor fulfilled this role on more than one occasion.

Winston Churchill is reported to have said, "If two people agree on everything, one of them is unnecessary." Healthy dialogue and effective conflict resolution almost always lead to a better plan.

On the other hand, a witty but anonymous corollary to Churchill's quote is, "If two people agree on everything, one of them is not thinking." That's a recipe for organizational disaster.

RICK SAYS
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BIZ LOCAL

GOODMANN INSURANCE EARNS IMT HONOR

Goodmann Insurance Services Inc. of Dubuque has been as a 2019 IMT Insurance Gem Agency.

Goodmann was one of the highest performing Insurance agencies in its six state territories (Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota, Nebraska, South Dakota and Wisconsin). Of the approximately 1,000 IMT agencies eli-

gible for consideration, only 77 received the distinction for 2019.

EYE CLINIC EARNS DYERSVILLE HONOR

Dyersville (Iowa) Area Chamber of Commerce has announced its business of the year.

The chamber presented The Woodland Eye Clinic with the award during its annual chamber meeting.

Karla Thompson, executive director of

the chamber, said Woodland Eye Clinic was one of five candidates for the award. The remaining nominees were Dairy Queen Grill & Chill, Fareway, Happy Joe's Pizza & Ice Cream and The Palace Saloon.

Thompson said Woodland Eye Clinic was picked for its generosity to the community, such as offering free screenings for veterans.

Additionally, the chamber also welcomed its new board president, Penny Offerman, who will succeed previous chamber board president Rob Blush.