



ABUSIVE

Chapter 8

Playing with Power

Sent: Sunday, April 8 at 11:40 pm

From: CEO

To: Exec Team

Subject: Meeting

Please come to tomorrow's meeting prepared to discuss one thing you would like one of your colleagues to change. There has been a lot of backbiting lately as several of you have reported to me, so it's time to get it out in the open. Should be an interesting discussion.

One of the best things about being a leader is the power that what you say goes. You have the ability to easily make or break someone and to have a little fun in the process. Power is the ultimate weapon! The challenge is having it come off as sincere and realistic, as if you had to do it.

An example of this would be to have your direct reports tell you what their career goals are. Encourage them to be as honest as they possibly can, even going so far as to offer up your job to them as an enticement to talk. For example, you could say something like, "What if I were to leave or be promoted, would you want this role?" This is a great way to suss out those who might be disloyal to you. You'll want to listen to their answers carefully. Do they praise you and say there is no way they could ever do your job? That's a keeper. If they do see themselves in your role, keep that to yourself for future use. You can cut them down in public with that little tidbit when it will hurt most. Finding others' vulnerabilities is the key to great leadership.

Here's where you need to be strategic about things. You will often have to wait several weeks or even months for just the right time to embarrass, mock, or humiliate someone who deserves it. Patience is great virtue when using power to your advantage. However, if the perfect opportunity doesn't present itself before you run the risk of forgetting what you were going to use, call a meeting! Set everyone up for a catfight and let the fur fly. Even if the premise of the meeting has nothing to do with what you want to embarrass someone with, it's your meeting and you can rain on the parade. And rain you will. The poor unsuspecting sop will never know what hit them.

Let's say you called the meeting to discuss conversations that had been going on recently. Even if there had been none, you can bet that someone will bring something up. Let them go on for awhile attacking each other. Wait until someone else attacks your prey and then pounce. Throw out what you know about them, what they told you in confidence, or something else you know would be humiliating, embarrassing, or just plain mean. Whether it's true or not doesn't matter. You're the leader and what you say and how you say is all the truth you need.

As a leader, you also need to make public displays of power. The reasons are irrelevant, but these displays become your chance to publically humiliate people, and that's the power move. Later, if anyone has the audacity to challenge you, you can privately lay them out and they become your next public victim. Pretty soon, no one will ever question you, which is exactly what you want. A culture of fear, intimidation, and unpredictability is the most productive of all. Most importantly, this type of culture ensures that you are the only one who truly and skillfully can wield the power. Only you have the sword. You will be on fire, so much so that you'll need a cigarette after your performance (which was almost better than sex after all)!

On occasion, you might have a few sad sacks who feel the need to come to the rescue of the one you're abusing. Again, if they do it publically, take them down swiftly and succinctly just like you did the first one. Never tolerate any vulnerability or empathy in your team. Those are traits of losers, not leaders.

This is how you use power: to get what you want, to crush those who threaten you, and to just generally play with people because you can. It really feels good. The best part is everybody wants to be you—they want to be the one wielding the invisible power wand. You can never have enough because power begets power and the more you use it, the more you'll get. So c'mon, get on the power train. You'll never get off!

Let's Get Real

Never use power to humiliate, embarrass, or otherwise demean another human being either privately or publically. Doing so just makes you look small, pathetic, and weak. Power is a tool to be used for doing what's right for the individual, the whole, and the greater good. Unfortunately, when some leaders get power, it goes to their heads and the only thing they can focus on is keeping it, hence the roadkill along the way. Exploiting someone's vulner-

ability is not leadership, it's abuse. Name-calling or belittling someone says more about the perpetrator than it does about the victim. What you call someone is usually what you are or what you fear. Words matter.

Being a power-hungry leader will get you the reputation of being an asshole and lead to dismal results. Real results come from using your power wisely: making good decisions, promoting those who do good work, acknowledging that work, helping others achieve their career goals, and never being afraid to do so. A good leader almost never uses power but rather leads and guides the organization to success through the successes of others and those of the team. Remember the phrase: "Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely." Very true.

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(How Not to) Be a Leader

by Mary E. Marshall & Kim Obbink

(How NOT to) Be a Leader is the first in a series of how-not-to guides for newly minted leaders looking to avoid becoming feared or hated losers in the ivory tower or veteran leaders looking in the rearview mirror wondering where and why they ran off the road. Irreverent and hilarious, *(How NOT to) Be a Leader* shines a big bright spotlight on the oh-so-common mistakes that many leaders make when they plow forward through life and business without taking the time to really consider the effect their leadership is having on others. We've all seen and heard the horror stories of bad leadership, and hopefully many of us have been lucky enough to have been the benefactor of truly great leadership. Either way, if it's your turn at the top, *(How NOT to) Be a Leader* will help you understand what you can do to be a better leader by first understanding what you should never ever do; and if you are, why you should back up the truck, take another look at yourself and your leadership qualities, and do the work and self-reflection needed to get back on track.

Why this book series? Having been in the leadership trenches for a combined fifty years, we've seen a lot. Some good, some bad, and some really, really horrible. There was no guide for us, and we want to help all those leaders who will come after us. Not with a boring manifesto about a fictional leader who only exists in a book, but with real-life stories we've experienced or even perpetrated ourselves and vow never to repeat.

This book consists of twenty-four characteristics that you don't want to be known for. Not all twenty-four will apply to you and a few might resonate louder than others. What was it you heard in your last 360? Micromanaging doesn't work? You aren't listening? You want everyone to do it your way? You might have a few to work on, and our challenge to you is to choose three or four that seem the most immediate and start working on those. Once you've mastered them, take on a few more. And certainly share the book with those around you whose leadership styles need a little polish.

Should you accept this leadership challenge, you will be able to quickly identify twenty-four ineffective leadership traits and make changes to positively address them. Through the stories in this book, you will learn how to avoid the pitfalls of leadership, how to be a better leader, and, most importantly, how to pass good leadership on to those you lead.

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