



PHONY

Chapter 9

The Irrelevance of Truth

Sent: Tuesday, February 3 at 6:45 pm

From: CEO

To: All Staff

Subject: Difficult Times Ahead

All,

I regret to announce that due to recent decisions by your management team, we're going to be shutting down the San Diego plant. Although this will result in layoffs, all of these people will be offered jobs at our new facility in Fargo, North Dakota. We look forward to our continued growth and profits. The new location offers so much in the way of quality of life and lower cost of living that I'm sure many of you will want to trade your overpriced houses for that much desired white Christmas!

The truth: What is it really? And according to whom? And by the way, exaggeration is not lying, it's just a little aberration on the truth, but it's perfectly acceptable. Remember, there is no actual truth squad, much to some of the elites' dismay.

The point is, you don't need to worry about the truth when you're in pursuit of something. If it gets you what you want, it's the right thing to do: it's your truth that matters. And, because you're the leader, who the hell are they to question you anyway? As we said, the truth is only the truth insofar as it gets you what you want.

When someone is called a liar, it's usually not meant in a positive light. As if they've done something wrong. But seriously, there are about one hundred definitions for lies: little lies, white lies, black lies, lies by omission, lies to spare someone's feelings, whoppers, monsters, prevarications, forgeries, identity theft, untruths, lies of commission, fabrications, errors, restructuring, denial, minimization, and exaggeration, just to name a few. With all of these definitions, how can this be something that is wrong? Clearly, it's a leadership tactic that you must employ.

As a leader, you have to use all the resources at your disposal. Lying is a really good one, and more importantly, it's effective. And it's effective mainly because no one expects leaders to do it, and with the element of surprise, you are successful with it more often than not. If someone does dare to question or confront you, the key is to do one of two things. The first is to own it quickly, explain why it was the right thing to do, then apologize and move on (meaning don't give it another thought). The important thing here is to show why it was the right thing to do: it was a means to an end that was justified. The second is to absolutely deny that you lied and make them think they misunderstood, or, if that doesn't work, just blame someone else. Never admit guilt—that is just a losing strategy.

Remember that all great leaders lie. How else would they have gotten where they are? Take the email at the head of this chapter for example. No one living in San Diego wants to move to North Dakota, even if they do want a white Christmas. But when someone in authority tells you this is the truth, you give it a second look. Then you look for further proof that this might in fact be true. (And let's be clear, you can find any and all points of view on the Internet because conspiracy theories and fake news rule the day.) Before long, you're actually believing that you want to move to North Dakota for a white Christmas, and, oh by the way, for half the pay. See how well that worked?

As a leader, the key is not to give too much information at once. Don't get yourself tripped up right out of the chute. Leave enough wiggle room that you can just make stuff up as needed. Truth is your friend, but stick to it only as long as it serves your purpose.

Let's Get Real

The truth is an absolute imperative to great leadership. There are no exceptions to this rule. This does not mean complete and total transparency at all times because you need to be sensitive to privacy and timing and use strategy and tactics to communicate effectively to get the most positive result and reaction. But when you do speak, you must speak the absolute truth and every word that leaves your mouth or your keyboard must be impeccable.

Most human beings default to a trust state when it comes to the internal assessment of leadership. Until that trust is broken. From the very first time that trust is broken, regardless of how minor the break in trust, the default state of those being lead will be fear, mistrust, suspicion, and doubt. As a defense mechanism, those you lead will hunt for and expect lies and untruths, changing the dynamic in a way that can never be repaired. Truthfulness and trustworthiness are the most valuable characteristics of a great leader and should be pro-

tected and revered at every step. If not, your lack of these qualities will precede you in every step you take. The result: an abandonment and forfeiture of leadership forever.

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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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