



SUBVERSIVE

Chapter 24

Hub and Spokin'

Sent: Monday, July 24 at 9:30 am

From: CEO

To: Executive Team

Subject: One-to-Ones Today

I've got some critical information to share with each of you so starting at 11:00. I'll make myself available for individual meetings. Please just sign up with my assistant. I'll need 30 minutes with each of you. Clear your schedule to fit mine if you've already got something going.

All the leadership books tell you that, in order to grow a great team, you need to mentor people. Naturally, you might have found mentoring to be a strong suit of yours as people always gravitate towards you as a leader and want to learn from you. The key to mentee development is to meet individually with each of your team members. You're probably thinking, "Geez, doesn't that take up a lot of time?" Not if you do it the right way!

Only do it once a month. That's plenty of time for you to get your point across. These meetings are called one-to-ones, but it's really your time to ascertain whether or not this person is being loyal to you. Not to the company, only to you. Of course, you will impart some words of wisdom, but if they don't respond with a sufficient level of praise and gratitude, you might have a problem. Naturally, you'll want to tell them it's all about them and you are there to listen, but seriously, what could they possibly say that you don't already know—or should know!

So, here's the real brilliance of mentoring. Call it hub and spokin,' a takeoff on some speaker somewhere who talked about culture. Bottom line, you're the hub, always because, as the hub, you're the greatest person in the room and everyone else is well, less than that. If you want to keep your team in line, you have to be the repository of all information, and you get to decide who hears what. Whether it's the same information you're sharing with each of them, or different information, the important thing is to do it separately! This way you maximize your pull. If your people all hear the same thing at the same time, you run the risk of them ganging up on you because you've lost your leverage! The key is keeping them isolated and guessing.

Don't bother to set these as recurring meetings, because, Gawd, that would really play havoc with your schedule, and you want to maintain as much flexibility as possible. Just go ahead and set them when you have a hole in your schedule or when something necessitates you getting all your little minions in line. Besides, this keeps them on their toes in anticipation of their monthly one-to-one with you. Remember, unpredictability is key.

Unpredictability is where the brilliance comes in. They won't have any idea what you want to talk about, so you already have them on the defensive. Then tell them what you're upset about and see what solutions they have for you. If one of them has a good one, say that's exactly what you were thinking and then tell them that you really look at them as your second-in-command, regardless of whether you do or not. Saying this will puff them up and get them on your side, which is what you want. If they have something they need to talk about, tell them to schedule some other time with your assistant and make sure it never shows up on your calendar. Also be sure to tell them that you expect them to figure out their own issues because that's how you got to where you are, isn't it? Nobody helped you! Make them feel small for even asking.

Now, a critical point here is to make sure they know that what you discussed is a secret between you and them. Just to make sure they feel special, make a couple of snarky comments about some of the other managers so they know you really mean it. This is a great way to test who can be trusted and who cannot. If for whatever reason they start comparing notes, well, they have just violated your rules and they will not be in the inner circle for long.

The easy part of this whole process is that you simply rinse and repeat with all your direct reports. Since you aren't really planning on listening to anything they have to say, you can just sit back and work on improving your facial expressions and body language. Saying the same thing to each one is the point. They are never going to question what you say if they think they are the chosen heir. Just keep telling them they are! They are all the spokes to your hub, and your job is to make sure they never become a hub. That could be dangerous for you, and it's certainly not leader-like.

Wasn't that easy? Mentoring in thirty minutes or less, and you now have more time to hit the links! One final note on this: If you do catch your people comparing notes on the fact that you told several of them the same thing about them being your special manager or next in line for a promotion, or that you told them different things, deny, deny, deny. Ask them why they would spread rumors like that when, of course, you said no such thing. Question them as to how they could have possibly misunderstood! Then write them up.

The key is to stop that spoke in its tracks. Put a stick in those spokes so the rider does a face-plant.

Let's Get Real

Having private meetings for disseminating public information creates a culture of mistrust. Meet with teams in groups of three or more. Never tell someone they are your *chosen one* or that they are in line for a promotion if they aren't. That's just mean and disingenuous. Mentorship is about the mentee, not you, so ask them how they want to grow into their leadership shoes and how you can help. This is not about *you*!

Being a leader is about being open and honest. Never letting others hear your conversations or sending different messages to different people teaches a very dangerous form of leadership, one that is about mistrust and how to keep that value alive.

People do not behave their best in a culture of mistrust. In order to behave and perform their best, people need to know that the words of their leaders and fellow employees are honest and can be heard in the light of day. If something can't be aired in public and it's something the entire company should know, it should not be held in a didactic conversation.

Leaders grow with information, truth, and each other. Lead the way.

Table of Contents

Preface	1
Section 1: Debunking the Stereotype	
Introduction: Now You're Bossing!	5
Flaunt Your Wealth, You've Earned It!	7
One-to-Ones: You + You = 3	11
You're the Smartest Person in the Room	15
I'm Sorry ... What?	19
It's All about You	23
You Have All the Answers	27
Large and in Charge	31
Playing with Power	35
Section 2: Valuing Your Values	
Introduction: There's an Elephant's Asshole in the Room	41
The Irrelevance of Truth	43
Make Sure Everyone Knows When You're Upset	47
Show up as Anyone but Yourself	51
Drop Your Integrity	55
Be Loved	59
Managing Your Personal Brand	63
Evil Rules	67
Tears: Your Power Drug	71
Section 3: Leading by Example	
Introduction: The Road to Hell, Perfectly Paved by You	77
Micromanage the Shit out of Everything	79
Be Best Buds	83
Follow the Leader	87
The Waiting Game	91
Winning the Blame Game	95
Hazing as an Art Form	99
Gender Matters	103
Hub and Spokin'	107
About the Authors	111

(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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