



LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS: COURAGE TO PROMOTE REALITY

As leaders, we come with a title and influence that make it incredibly hard for people to tell us we are making mistakes. Individual leaders and leadership teams are often shocked to learn that just about everyone around them is “afraid” or finds them “intimidating” — believes that the leadership team is to be feared.

The current political situation—signaled by American whistleblowers and other truth-tellers losing their jobs, and dissidents in other parts of the world being jailed or worse—adds to the angst.

This is contrary to the message we bring to our coaching clients. It is essential to surround yourself with people who will tell you the truth. *You can't solve problems you don't know about.* How could someone overcome their own leadership deficits if all they hear is how wonderful they are!? If you are a self-aware leader who wants to continue to grow, you (and those around you) will benefit from making it easier for people to tell you what you need to hear.

Five ways to ensure you are hearing what you need to hear, not just what people imagine you want to hear, are:

- 1) Visibly reward people who speak truthfully about key issues, especially uncomfortable topics.
- 2) Frequently meet with people face-to-face for listening sessions. Just show up and listen without judging, editorializing, or commenting. Come back within a week with a solution, an innovation, or something that demonstrably shows you listened and learned.
- 3) Check your emotions. Make sure you don't appear to have body language or other reactions that shut people down. There are “tells” that can be very hard to notice in one's self, while being very obvious to observers.
- 4) Ask people what issues need to be discussed yet are difficult for them to talk about. Top answers tend to be: Your impact on them as their leader; the impact their peers have on them; needing information they think you expect them to know; a flaw in a process, product or system you believe is infallible; and anything related to possibly demonstrating a vulnerability of any type.
- 5) Keep listening. Leaders often think they are listening when they are actually defending their position.

Remember that meaningful challenging-up and “Divergent, dissident voices are the key(s) to growth and innovation.” That quote is from [Don't Demonize Employees who Raise Problems](#) published by *Harvard Business Review* January 30, 2020. Check it out.

Are you a leader who welcomes bad news that could move your organization forward if understood and confronted head on? If you are not hearing what you need to hear to avert negative outcomes shrouded through rose-colored glasses, what can you do to open up communications from your people?