



LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS: CHOOSING COMPOSURE

Last week I stood in line at a crowded and loud airport restaurant waiting for service. Because I had very little time, I decided it would be faster to order at the counter, rather than sitting down, relaxing and waiting to be served.

When I finally arrived at the front of the line to give my order, the young man behind the counter was having a discussion with two other employees about the inferior performance of one of their peers. Then they got into an argument about what day this peer worked and what time he came in... After about 3 minutes, I started to feel “triggered” by this situation. My internal dialogue was going off, “Gee, I wonder if I am invisible? Why didn’t anyone ask me if they could take my order? Why don’t they do their jobs?”

I wanted to find the manager and start “coaching”! I paused, took a deep breath, and decided that it was not in my best interest to give anyone a piece of my mind at a time when what I really needed was prompt service.

The point to this story is... I have a **choice** about my behavior. I decided to maintain my composure and seek a better outcome for myself. Awareness that we can **choose** how we behave – that we are not obligated to act on impulse – is an important key to leadership effectiveness.

I have seen many executives “fly off the handle” in airports – talking disrespectfully to wait staff, flight attendants, and even other people in line. I have seen that same behavior show itself in business meetings. “Losing it” destroys or greatly impairs trust, candor, upward feedback, and teamwork. For example, many great executives have a tendency to be “intense.” Intense people are very serious, and usually have strong emotions and/or opinions; they can have a powerful effect on those around them.

However, behaving too intensely in a brainstorming session, or in fact in *any* business situation, tends to create an environment where people do not feel safe sharing their ideas. Highly innovative ideas that may run counter to those of the intense executive, or ideas that are not yet perfect but may be beneficial to the organization, might never be mentioned.

The best leaders are those who are self-aware enough to be flexible and apply the right affect and behavior in each specific situation. This isn’t being inauthentic; it is being emotionally sound. In exercising awareness and self-control, executives can access the character traits that will work most effectively in each particular situation. Try it. See if you have that ability or if you get stuck reacting to triggers too frequently.

What examples have you seen recently where someone seemed to lose control of a situation by losing composure? When have you done that and fairly quickly regretted it?