

# A View

From the Prairie

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## Command or Leadership?

Panic buying, people hiding in their homes, and yet, others totally ignoring all the containment rules. What we see are two different reactions to governments attempting to control a situation. It all comes down to whether or not people believe the leaders and their message. We see the same things happen in business – people following the leaders or doing their own thing. We can choose to command or to be leaders. History shows that it takes more time and effort to be a leader, but the results often are better. Leadership is built upon a foundation of honesty and integrity.

Throughout history, people in charge have selected either to command or to be leaders. The difference is whether to use force or persuasion. Both methods work to get others to act in certain ways. Each has limits and strengths.

In an emergency, how people respond is partly based on how well they believe those who are trying to provide order. Those who believe them, follow the rules. Those who do not believe, act according to their own ideas of how best to act. The results are wildly divergent.

When a government has relied on command to control the state, many people act in accordance with those commands in public, but act differently in private. In the current pandemics, much of the spread was done by people who did not follow the attempts by government to control the situation. This is true both in China with the Corona virus and in the Congo with the current Ebola outbreak. In other countries, the

virus is spreading most in countries where people do not trust their governments. Many people in those countries do not believe their governments and thus, were not following the government rules (such as traffic laws) earlier and are not following the rules now.

In businesses that have relied on command, we see the same thing: workers appear to be following the rules, but do their own interpretation of what the rules are supposed to be. A Soviet worker once said, “we pretend to work and they pretend to pay us.” Companies that have grown very fast often have not communicated the company values well to all the new people and wind up with workers acting in ways that they don’t want.

The United States was founded on ideals, not force. From the first, the open continent meant that anyone who did not like the current authorities could, and did, leave to find another place to live (as Davy Crockett said after losing an election, “I would go to Texas.”) The only thing holding the country together has been ideals. “We hold these truths to be self-evident....”

Right now, our survival depends on people following the rules. That is not possible when loud voices are questioning the basic American principles. Likewise, with places being shut down and people working from home, the business survival depends on how well people believe their leaders and follow the rules.

Leadership means standing for ideas, not just for personal gain.

## Risky World

In this situation, a number of the facial recognition software won’t recognize people who are wearing a face mask. The solution is an artist who will print a face on the face mask. The trouble is that it isn’t your face. You will have to train your phone to recognize the new face.

## Organizations and Diversity

A recent finding is that companies with more diverse boards are generally doing better than the rest of the companies. Part of the reason is that the diversity is bringing needed difference of opinion to top management. It doesn’t work to simply add token outsiders to a board. The goal is to have a diversity of ideas and experiences that are heard and accepted.

Some organizations are run by dominant personalities that do not want difference of opinion. They fire those who would disagree with them. Often, these organizations do well for a while and then, get totally blindsided by some event or outside action. These organizations are very attractive while they are succeeding. For example, Enron was considered a great place to work until it cratered.

Here is where having diverse boards and differing opinions matters. When conditions are changing, it helps to have many different views in order to not miss great opportunities or to see and avoid rare disasters.

Rare disasters do happen. Actually, they happen at fairly regular intervals. It is just that the next disaster won’t be like the last one, but it will often be just as bad. The question that any board has is: can you identify what the next most likely disaster might be? The current pandemic has been predicted for years. Did anyone on your board listen and ask how your organization will handle it?

Monolithic boards or organizations led by a dominant personality are far more likely to miss or discount the disaster until it has overwhelmed them.

Organizations that are open to “outsider” ideas are more likely to survive the changing environment.

Force  
or  
Ideas

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