

The DOERS AND THE DOO-DOO IN LEADERSHIP: Tales of Two Entirely Different Aromas

I just recently entered my 25th year of sales and leadership consulting and I'd like to share the really good – and the really horrendous things I've seen. Wipe your hands after reading this as there is doo-doo throughout the article.

- One Fortune 500 client's CEO was one of the greater CEO's I've ever worked with – always value-added with both his people and clients. I should have wised up sooner as the V.P. he traveled with the most was a stunner. He changed as he made one acquisition after another as his goal was to be the largest. Greed became his priority. He is now in a Federal prison for life. A fool and his money are soon parted. Grade: F.
Message: Focus on being the best – not the biggest. I firmly believe size doesn't matter.

- The Sales Manager for a food manufacturer handled a house account that was one of their largest clients. I found out “we” were furnishing a buyer with liquor, hotel – and a prostitute. I went to the CEO and suggested that he and I go visit the top executives and start offering value-added services and extract ourselves from our current conduct. He vetoed my suggestion fearing we would lose the business – and he was a Deacon in his church. They went out of business as the CEO was too timid on changing anything. At first I thought he was just indecisive, but now I'm not so sure. Grade: F.
Message: The father (deceased) appointed his son as his successor. Father's need strong mentors before making huge decisions, especially with family businesses. The sole reason the CEO inherited the position was that he was the oldest child.

- I was recommended to a client that was stalled at about \$35 million. I replaced a team of consultants who stated in their final report that “There are no internal candidates for the vacant President's position.” On my first day I selected and received Board approval for two internal gentlemen for both the President's position and a newly created position of V.P. of Sales. Al had never been in sales, but with his high drive and intelligence, I knew he was the person for what we needed most – more sales.

Both of these men were great students and got on with it. The new President said, “Bill, your reputation is that you tell the truth. So on a 1 to 10 scale, how do you rate me so far in my new role?” My rapid reply was “3”. We were having lunch and I almost had to perform the Heimlich maneuver on him. After swallowing his food, he asked, “How good do you think I can become with your help?” Easy answer – “10 if you act on everything you’re agreeing to.” He did. They grew and he retired early and wealthy.

AI was later promoted from V.P. of Sales to President. Revenue soared from \$35 million to over \$200 million. Leadership, leadership, leadership. Grade for both: A
Message: Be smart when selecting consultants. They must have great reference and reference letters. Don’t hire “C” consultants if you want “A” results.

- An aviation client was light years ahead of the curve with his culture and added-value provided to his people. Some examples include:
 - While belonging to the Jewish faith, he had a large Christmas tree in the lobby that was surrounded by very, very nice hand-selected (by his wife) gifts for everyone.
 - Two masseuses came in every week for massages for anyone – including part-time interns/students. All that was required to get the treatment? Just sign up.
 - Two exercise rooms with state of the art equipment were onsite.
 - A “Quiet Room” had lounge chairs and stereo system with headphones to listen to music or educational programs. Or just take a nap as his dedicated sales people often put in 12 hours daily. Advice: Don’t nap at your desk, but if you do and get caught – quickly say, “Amen.”
 - 5-star trips and get-aways.
 - And more.

Grade: A

Message: If you are a job seeker, learn more about their culture. And seek out firms that truly care about their people.

- A food processor, with fantastic products, was led by a bi-polar CEO – a family hereditary condition. I increased a \$1 million client to \$2 million and that client fell “in love” with our former order-taking salesperson that had learned that value-added services and relationship selling pays, well, \$ millions. The client wanted us to have a \$5 million product with reduced quality but our CEO stated, “No way.” Why not? “I don’t want my name on a #2 product. It’s private-labeled and the consumer will see the manufacturer’s plant number on the package.” Uh, I forgot consumers check plant numbers on everything they buy. Unfortunately, we could get the CEO to say “Yes” one day while getting a “*#!*! NO!” the next day. If we got him face-to-face, however, with a client, he would give the store away to the same clients he had said “*#!*! NO!” to a week prior.

There was an equipment auction being held at a bankrupt food processor’s facility. He signed a blank check and told his daughter, who was only 1 or 2 months out of college, to “buy anything you think we need” and the CEO was off to another mystery trip. Gone and out of touch. Needless to say, she was petrified. My advice to her was “buy nothing.” Her trembling, from fear, ceased.

The contractor creating a new, sophisticated plant packed up to leave the project out of frustration with the CEO and it took attorneys and the Sheriff to calm everything down. Oh, there’s a lot more to this story, but after being totally happy with me for 2 ½ years he suddenly wasn’t as his habits of buying motorcycles, racing and disappearing in the mountains became more frequent and costly. And then the CEO, behind in his payments to me, asked me to participate in two big functions on a “cash basis”. He had paid all of my expenses, but owed me about \$50,000. His response to getting caught up: “I’ve paid you enough – from now on its commission only.” Easy answer for me. I didn’t accept the offer – would you? I loved him like a brother, but I passed on his \$12,000 offer without hesitation. I don’t just teach and coach ethics. I score 100% in this area. Grade: F. Message: Don’t assume that great times will always be great. And if you’re bi-polar, please take medication – daily!

- A Fortune 500 firm wanted me to speak for an international meeting with about 2,000 attendees. The V.P. of Worldwide Sales asked to meet with me in advance and stated he wanted me on a retainer basis to begin consulting immediately after my speech.

Robin Williams, the comedian, did his thing just before me and I was the closing speaker. When I finished only two people went to chat with Robin – the V.P. and his wife. Over 500 asked me to sign my book that each attendee was given. The Marketing Manager escorted me to the limo and said, “You can forget about consulting with us.” I was stunned, but asked, “Why not?” to which she replied, “You’re too good for him (the V.P.). His ego won’t allow it.” Within the year, they laid off 700 employees. Grade: F. Message: Hire consultants and mentors that are better than you in critical areas.

- A major airline, going through bankruptcy, arranged for me to speak at an annual sales meeting. I arrived at the hotel and didn’t see their name on the electronic board listing both the groups and the name of the meeting room. The front desk personnel confirmed, “No, they aren’t meeting here.” Using my cell, I called the airline’s Sales, Marketing and Human Resources departments and heard a voicemail: “I’m out today for a sales meeting, please leave a message and...” I then called their headquarters and reached a receptionist who told me she would get the details and call me back.

She called back and said, “They changed hotels.” I broke speed limits to get there and rushed to get everything set-up for my presentation, but the V.P. of Sales wasn’t there and was 30-45 minutes late as “He’s probably got a hang-over from last night.” So the group just drank coffee and talked about sex. Jokes about PMS aren’t funny. Period.

They had invited the V.P. of Operations and he arrived just after I finished speaking. It wasn’t just that their flights weren’t on time – their “leaders” weren’t either. This was a culture of very low expectations and they met them. Perpetual liars can be successful in this industry – as Flight Schedulers. And the CEO went to jail for a DUI. Quite the group. Grade: F.

Message: Their lousy results came from a lousy culture.

- I worked with DW Distribution, a building materials firm, for over 5 years and the Founder, CEO and the President were and are all chock-full of integrity. Not once did they come close to wavering from their principles. Their words, promises, and relationships with both clients and employees were like gold. Byron, the President, was so respected he served repeated terms as Chairman of the National Association of Wholesalers. This association, also called NAW, has collective revenues in the trillions and labor force in the millions. To serve as the head of this organization, who Congress depends on for valuable information, speaks volumes about his qualities as a leader.

The Potter family was recently awarded the coveted Baylor University award “Texas Family Business of the Year” for 2012. Baylor describes the award: “The award is given to the successful family business, which demonstrates management techniques resulting in efficiency and effectiveness in operations and contributing to the quality of the work environment.” This firm knew that education was expensive, but ignorance was costlier. They invested in their people and still do.

Examples of how Byron and Nathan Potter treat people: 1) Sent me home with 2 days left on a weekly assignment – with pay. 2) Without my knowledge, Byron told me to not schedule anything the evening of my birthday. About 5:00 pm, I found out Byron had flown my wife into Dallas, had a limo take us to a great restaurant and more. And Byron was there to make sure the limo arrived. The driver had instructions “to drive you anywhere you want until sunrise.” 3) Nathan flew to me, several years after I worked with them, just to give me a gift certificate as “Our family really appreciates you.” It’s no surprise that their great employees have been there for decades. Grade A.

Message: Learn how to treat employees, vendors and consultants. Working with them was an honor I still cherish. Ethics to the extreme.

- A Mississippi CEO brought me in and I learned that he had disconnected the outbound sales department’s computers which the salespeople needed for architectural drawings for potential clients. Why? He “caught” a salesperson communicating with his wife about

their ill child on company time. He wouldn't allow them to hook up their computers. His granddaughter was in tears as I was her only hope and I failed her. He called and asked me to return to which I refused and said, "You're going to go out of business if you don't hook up the computers. He refused and they went out of business. I'll never forget the tears nor the 200 people who lost their jobs. I bet when he watched Jacques Cousteau he rooted for the sharks. Grade: F.

Message: Listen to Forrest Gump's line about *stupid*.

- The CEO of a 3-star hotel in Scottsdale had a bartender open a mini-bar just outside of his office to start fixing martinis for him around 8:00 am followed by a martini break at 10:00, lunch, 2:00 and 5:00. He told me, over his favorite beverage, that he was going to fire two people I had been mentoring – the V.P. of Sales and a Salesperson. I asked "Why" to which he replied, "You've done such a good job that they both will get their maximum bonus in December and I don't want to pay them." I told him that if he did such, I would resign. I came back the next week (late November) and both had been fired. I resigned while not having another dime coming in from other clients. I helped one start his own business and he is still doing well 20 years later.

The next year, he got into hot water in the press for pricing irregularities with groups coming to stay there for the Super Bowl. Surprised? Grade: F.

Message: If the CEO drinks alcohol in the morning, you don't want to work there. Nor let him drive you anywhere.

- The CEO of an automobile dealership (11 of them) heard me speak and hired me to speak and consult for his group. I was excited as I was mentoring two volunteers to get ready to conduct in-person sales visits with corporations – especially with entrepreneurs who don't have the time for visiting dealerships. It beats waiting for buyers to come in any day. A tip: I never go to a dealership and put up with their nonsense. I view the cars online and I know what I'm going to pay, especially if I lease it. I have them deliver the car to me and bring the paperwork. I reduce an all-day chore down to 15 minutes of

pleasure. I also have them pick up my vehicle for service – and the salesperson leaves his/her auto with me.

Now, back to the dealer. I was providing a seminar when the owner burst in the room and screamed for everyone to “get back to work.” The attendees turned in their evaluations of my seminar. Comments ranged from “Best ever” to “I learned more in one-hour than 16 hours from the #1 guru in the automobile dealer industry. But, the owner killed the attitude and skills-building I was providing. I found out later he was a former boxer with brain damage and was also bi-polar. He missed the opportunity to gain many “millions” but no one had the _____ to tell him to “stay out of here.” If he got involved in accounting, I would imagine a sign would read, “The best way to get back on your feet – miss a car payment.” Grade: F.

Message: Stay about 100 feet away from crazy people.

- A building materials manufacturer was experiencing their first ever sales decline when they brought me in. The V.P. of Sales, who I planned on mentoring was failing badly, walking around in a fog, and he wasn't grasping my help. I had already stepped in as interim V.P. of Sales and we hit record revenue in 4 months. Then the V.P. asked to meet with me to confidentially tell me he was being treated for depression. He asked that I advise the President. I reminded the President that it was an illness, not negligence. He followed me to meet with the V.P. and hugged him. Classy.

Eventually, we reached agreement with the V.P. that he would need to do something else. It resulted in him leaving and working to get his life back together. The severance? One year's compensation, health benefits, company car, cell, administrative assistance and more.

The President didn't like neither flying nor staying in a hotel. My last day with the company was at a huge trade show in Las Vegas. He flew out just to take me to lunch to thank me in the presence of other executives. Then he flew back home just after lunch.

He showed compassion with the former V.P. and displayed appreciation to me. In both instances, he displayed grace and professionalism at its best. Grade: A.

Message: I earned 7-figures and their V.P.'s and up received huge retention checks for staying until they sold. Their 100% support put \$millions in their wallets. They acted on 99% of my suggestions – unlike some who say they will – and don't.

- An officer with the Rockefeller Foundation heard me speak and approached me afterwards about a furniture manufacturer that needed my help – and the Foundation would pay a nice portion of my consulting fees. On arrival, the V.P. of Sales told me not to mention to anyone in the restaurant we were going to who I was working with due to their poor reputation in the community. A lady in business attire stopped by our table and said, “You two have been laughing a lot – who are you and what do you do?” I told her and included my client's name. She picked up her purse and keys and left without saying another word. The V.P.'s warning was correct. And I soon saw how they earned their reputation.

The CEO had just conducted a plant tour with a potential client. He was showing a chair to the visitor and out of nowhere he picked it up and threw it about 10 feet at the Plant Manager. And I witnessed incidents worse than that one.

After a few trips, a President of a bank, who was a Board member, asked the President why he hadn't invited me to be on the Board. He continued with, “I'm embarrassed to be one of your Board members due to the way the CEO treats people. We really need to let him go.” At a Board meeting, 100% voted in favor of the discharge. We held the meeting and advised the CEO of the decision. His first response was to address the attendees one at a time with “Jim, if you had anything to do with this, may God have mercy on your soul.” After 4 more people, I also got the mercy warning. Since he was a part-time Minister, I thought he had a great connection so I remained silent. I wasn't ready for Judgment Day in Arkansas.

The V.P. got up to go to the restroom and the CEO grabbed him by the throat and slammed him against the wall. When he let him go, he turned to all of us with his final threats, slammed the door and got in his car screeching tires. I told the President, “Now do you see why I suggested the Sheriff’s Department be here?” His reply was, “Come on; we’re getting out of here” to which I replied, “No way. Call the Sheriff and get a deputy down here in case he returns. Your job right now is to provide protection for your people.”

He then advised me about a famous trial for the murders of several Civil Rights victims. “He was found innocent, but he wasn’t.” Not being totally dumb, I said, “I’m out of here.” I got my belongings and quickly “got out of Dodge” for the Little Rock airport. Just my luck to then get in line with a guy who was a nervous wreck about flying. One of his questions was, “Do I have to get on one of these computer planes?” He meant commuter, which gave me my first chuckle for the day. It didn’t last as a retired gentleman took my luggage from the carousel in Jacksonville by mistake. I got my luggage at 3:00 AM and I have never checked another bag since. My bags have visited more cities than I have.

Three days later they rehired the CEO. My guess is that they CEO told his son (President) he would cut him out of his will. I never went back. Grade F.

Message: The Board should have terminated him a decade earlier or arranged for his dream job – operate a Turkish prison.

I certainly have many more experiences to share with both A and F clients, but I will share that the F clients far out-number the A’s. I’ve learned not to accept any more work from F clients that embrace failure and manage (not lead) by fear. And I also learned to eat nuts – not work with them.

Michelangelo said it best by stating, “The greatest danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but that it is too low and we reach it.” It’s all too common in both leadership and sales worldwide.

The summary? Leadership determined every A and F score. This article is just a set-up for my next article that will give you ideas for scoring all A's in leadership and sales. I might title it, "Helium" as you won't be able to put it down.

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