No Excuses, No Complaints

2 More Things That Separate Effective Leaders from Other Leaders

By David A. O'Brien, WorkChoice Solutions

After listening to Bob share his frustrations about his team for nearly 20 minutes, I was struck by several powerful observations. One was that while his concerns seemed somewhat warranted, I couldn't help but think that they were focused almost entirely on excuses and complaints. Additionally, I could not ignore one burning question, *what example did his complaining and excuse making set for his team*? When I shared my observations with Bob he appreciated the feedback and was quick to admit that indeed, excuses and complaints had become part of the norm within his department. He added "if they spent less time complaining and making excuses, they could all help close their department's productivity gap".

Although we both agreed that eliminating the excuses and complaints from his department would have many benefits, I reminded him that eliminating certain types of complaints could actually have a negative impact. As leaders, we need to encourage (and give) constructive feedback. What separates constructive feedback from complaints is largely a function of the solution orientation associated with the feedback. Clearly, it's one thing to predict the rain and then skirt any responsibility and it's entirely

a more accountable thing to predict the rain and then get busy building the ark.

In observing what separates effective leaders from the rest over the last 25 years, I have come to believe that one of the stand-out characteristics that highly successful leaders possess is that they don't make excuses and they never complain. Of course there are a multitude of other key success characteristics like integrity, self-awareness and consistency to name a few, but absent a deliberate effort to self-regulate excuses and complaints, the leader's influence is sure to be diminished.

Based on the tremendous impact that leadership behavior has on team morale and engagement, leaders that make excuses and complain with any degree of frequency not only foster that behavior among their team but also waste huge amounts of time and energy. Both of which are precious resources that should be spent on finding solutions and taking action. Beyond the consequences to the team, these negative behaviors can have an adverse impact on other stakeholders as well.

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In today's highly competitive, do-more-with-less work environment, leaders cannot afford to divert precious time and resources away from finding solutions and taking action to making excuses, fault finding or blame. Rather, they must foster an environment of trust, continuous improvement and accountability through their own actions and behavior.

Effective leaders deal in *now*, they deal in *reality* and they always focus on moving forward. In the words of leadership guru, Max DePree, "the first responsibility of the leader is to define reality". Adding context to the reality by communication the *reasons* for it is of course helpful but reaching for the crutch of excuse or blame only undermines leadership trust and influence.

7 More Things You Can Do Now:

1. Evaluate how much time you spend complaining and or making excuses and consider the impact it has on team morale, behavior and output as well as on your leadership influence.

2. Initiate a conversation with your leadership peer group about the complaining and or excuse making norms among this group and ask them to consider the above impact factors too. Also engage the group to identify strategies for reducing or eliminating these negative behaviors across the leadership ranks as well as the organization.

3. Initiate a conversation with your team to assess their perspective on these negative behaviors including the impact factors and solicit their recommendations for how the negative behaviors can be eliminated from team interactions.

4. Ask your team to consider the ratio of *complaints without solutions* to *constructive feedback with solutions* that typically occur in a given week. Initiate a deeper conversation with them about how the ratio impacts team success and satisfaction and how the *solution*s to

complaints ratio could be increased by some reasonable percentage over a specific period of time.

5. Invest 10 minutes in every team meeting (at least for the first few months) to explore what's working well and what could be improved upon in terms of the new behaviors. Consider doing this once a month after some progress has occurred.

6. Encourage a continuous improvement mindset by making it safe for your team to offer constructive feedback without fear of negative consequences.

7. Establish small, doable goals and metrics that will help you build momentum toward your own desired behavior change and remember that self-regulation is an important building block of effective leadership.

About David A. O'Brien

David is President of CT based WorkChoice Solutions, a trusted provider of leadership and team effectiveness training, coaching and consulting services that was founded in 2000. He works with a wide range of corporate, non-profit and public sector clients to help bring about sustainable improvements in organizational effectiveness. His first book, *The Navigator's Handbook, 101 Leadership Lessons for Work & Life* is available on-line and in bookstores nationwide. His second book, *The Navigator's Compass, 101 Steps Toward Leadership Excellence* was released in 2016 and is also available wherever books are sold. To learn more about the scope of David's work in helping leaders and teams to be more effective or to arrange for David to speak at your next conference or other special event, please visit WorkChoice Solutions on line at: www.workchoicesolutions.com or call him directly at 860.242.1070.