



When you cannot make them see the light, make them feel the heat –Ronald Reagan

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High performing leaders expect a lot of themselves and the people around them. But when the people around them drop the ball and are found wanting of those expectations, leaders can get disheartened. A leader can have all the elements for success in place, but still experience a loss or failure. It is only when the losses become a norm that some change or restructuring is required. As Einstein stated: "One cannot do the same thing over and over again and expect different results".

Leaders have to weigh holding people accountable or improving their performance as this will either result in improved performance or a downward spiral of failure. But what must a leader do when the mistake is repeatedly committed (deliberate or not) and is only discovered when it is too late to fix? Especially when, like clockwork, all one gets are excuses such as "I forgot", "I didn't have time", and "I'll respond next week". I believe it is worse when people become unresponsive because then the leaders cannot locate the source of the problem and thus cannot solve it.

How does the leader then turn around or reverse these repeated losses? Whilst it is clearly not the leader's fault, it is equally clearly their responsibility. A good leader takes a little more than their share of the blame and a little less than their share of the credit. One of the overused clichéd business leadership phrases that was initially supposed to be motivational is: "there is no 'I' in team". Teamwork is very important, but still each member of that team is also an individual with responsibilities and obligations within the team.

A leader cannot help being disappointed by failure and is allowed to express disappointment. The person responsible for the failure needs to hear and know that a lot of trust was put in them and that it is troubling that, again and again, they did not take their responsibility seriously enough. A cooling off period or a time-out is required. The person needs to feel a little distance and develop a sense that all that happened is not acceptable and should

not be taken lightly. If the time-out is not applied, the situation will continue to fester particularly when the leader sanctions the losses or failures by always responding "it is okay". Granted that this is a natural considerate response to utter but honestly, it is really conveying an excuse for bad behaviour. Also, be realistic – some people do not get it, and will never get it, no matter how much light you give them.

How does the leader then move the halogen beam close to singe a person's arm hairs just enough to get their attention? Accept that let downs are inevitable and allow oneself to express the disappointment. Be brutally honest about the causes for the failure and learn from them. Learn to differentiate between will and ability. Continue to inspire and appreciate team members by being kind and compassionate.



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