



CAREER MINUTE



Peers and Power Are a Potent Mix - Excerpted from *The Truth About Being a Leader...And Nothing But the Truth*

[By Dr. Karen Otazo]

Have you ever walked into a high school locker room or a martial arts class? The smell that hits you is that of competition and sweat. In meeting rooms in organizations around the world, the dynamics, if not the aroma, are similar, as peers jockey for power in an adult version of sports competition.

It's no accident that on feedback questionnaires of all kinds, peers tend to mark each other below scores received from bosses and direct reports. When you enter a leadership role, it's important to realize that the game has changed, and your new peers may now see you as competition.

It's usually not personal. A certain amount of distrust is natural because, now or in the future, you and your peers will be in direct competition for roles, resources, and remuneration. And it's okay, indeed healthy, to develop some caution regarding the motivation and moves of your peers. Otherwise, you could be in for a nasty surprise.

Consider Albert, who relied on another department's research and fact-finding capabilities. He soon found that their reports could be biased and that they did not give his group enough information.

Frustrated, he openly complained about the research department and refused to continue

using their reports. But Albert soon realized he was burning bridges with his actions. He backed off and approached the problem differently.

Using feedback gleaned from asking his clients what they thought, he let the research department know how the biases and omissions in their previous reports had upset his clients. When the emphasis was on serving clients, not helping a peer and possible competitor, the research department recognized and responded to the need to cooperate.

Given that resources are usually stretched and the interests of departments often don't coincide, developing trust with peers is tricky. Ideally, trust comes from knowing that a peer is able to put the organization's interests before his or her own and will give credit to other departments rather than taking total ownership.

But don't take it for granted that a peer will always act this way. Establish clear

guidelines and expectations for your work together. For instance, if you have to split a commission, agree on the percentage split in advance. And constantly monitor your joint efforts, giving quick feedback about what's working and what isn't if your peers' work diverges from the framework you set up.

In Albert's case, he found that providing clear guidelines and expectations backed by others was the first step in creating a good peer-group relationship. He also learned that he had to communicate constantly with and test the research team to be sure they were working toward compatible goals.

Remember, a peer today may be a boss tomorrow. So keep it clean and keep it clear, and you'll be happy that you did.

For more information about Dr. Karen Otazo, check out www.global-leadership-network.com.

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