

Written by Mike Stewart

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“Is it better to be loved or to be feared?” That was the question put forth by the Red Queen in Alice in Wonderland. After discovering that her loyal subjects were basically sycophants catering to her every whim while mocking her behind her back, she decided that fear is better. “Off with their heads!”

History and art tend to repeat themselves in real life. Power corrupts ultimately and ultimate power can be vicious and controlling. The insanity and cruelty of monarchs throughout time was known and dealt with by their handlers. Audacious acts of repression, debauchery, misappropriation, and bribery were carried out by the minions that enjoyed the riches and benefits of being associated with ultimate power. Disagree and you’ll lose your land, your position, even your head! Yet how many times did we later learn how quickly these same subordinates were found dangling in the gallows for offending the almighty king?

Corporate America is no different. Autocratic CEOs and Presidents of companies rule with iron hands. It requires self-confidence and skill to reach that level, but egos of those that reach that pinnacle are frequently insatiable. Fearful of losing their own heads, those in the inner circle agree with their every pronouncement and idea. They become an entourage of yes-people who protect the leader so he/she has no real idea what is going on out in the ranks. Only positive feedback reaches the leader, who at this point, thinks he’s being loved by the masses for his original thinking and great ways of moving the company forward while improving their lives. Nothing could be further from the truth. Programs and policies designed to look good for Wall Street are overloading and killing those working on Main Street.

“You’d be better off in hell than working here.” That from a long tenured staffer and from a recent co-worker who states, “Just wait until the economy does turn around. Everyone is looking for another job. It will be a ghost town here.” From another, “My goal was to do well and advance. I’m doing well, but there is no where to go. They’re reducing management positions already.” The mid-level managers are taking bets on how long the CEO will last. They’ve outlived several other regimes. “He thinks we all love him. In reality, we think he’s an egocentric moron.” “He doesn’t know a thing about our business.” “Doing more with less..I don’t have time to see my family now. I have no life.” “Liars and cheats.” “Bastards!” We hear it in the hallways everyday.

So which are you, CEO? Are you the emperor with no clothes? Do you really take the time to know what is going on in your business or are you so consumed with the wealth and power you control that you just want to manipulate people? Is that next big bonus worth turning a blind eye on your scruples (if you ever had any)? Restate a number here, move gains forward and losses back to last year’s reporting. Fail to keep up with the technology that once had your company leading the industry because you’re devoting too much time and effort to micromanaging every action in your sales force. Promising to keep lower paying clerical jobs

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in America, then reneging by shifting them all overseas. Blow millions of corporate funds entertaining your cronies. Your lipstick is wearing off, Ms Piggy.

So which is better, ruling with fear or love? Fear is crippling. Eventually the masses will have enough and rise up against it. It may not have the revolutionary impact of 1918, but change will come. Some will walk away, others slow down or refuse the insanity of it all. Perhaps a request for intervention by the EEOC, wage and hour board or the union will come. Mr. CEO will be looking to crush that now.

Fear or love? In my experience, it is best to be respected. One can lead without exploiting the troops. You, Mr. CEO are NOT respected.