

PRIDE – A LEADER’S GREATEST PROBLEM

In my last column titled *Eagles and Turkeys*, I mentioned the recent passing of Bob Ritchie. Bob was a gentleman, a great lawyer with a heart for people. I learned recently of the passing of Zane Daniel. I enjoyed Zane immensely. Zane always had a big smile and was never too busy to stop for a brief chat. Zane was such an asset to our profession. Both of these men were great **Eagles!**



Dwelling on the passing of these two great men, I am reminded of a poem my father wrote many years ago called “A Friend,” and I share it with you in honor of these two great members of our profession.

A Friend

By Joseph W. Lawson

A friend is a present you give to yourself,

That’s one of my old-time songs;

So I’ll put you with the best of them,

For you’re where the best belongs.

Among the gifts I have given to me,

Most comforting tried and true;

The one that I most often think about,

Is the gift to myself of you.

In trying to select the subject for this issue of *The Eagle’s Nest*, I wanted to discuss an issue that, if left unchecked, could affect the long-term success of every individual in a law firm, including partners, associates, paralegals, and professional staff. In time, the issue of *false pride* can destroy the very existence of the firm. I have observed this personally. You will remember in the first *Eagle’s Nest* article, we pointed out that leadership is influence, nothing more, nothing less – the ability to get others to follow you voluntarily. In today’s world, whether it’s your spouse, your children, or your employees or team members, long-term, you cannot make anyone do anything. Some might wonder how the topic of pride affects them personally when they do not supervise anyone. You do supervise someone, and it’s the toughest person you will ever supervise – it is YOU.

Each law firm has different characteristics that define its culture. One of the tenets of our firm was that each team member must embrace growth for themselves and the firm. We recognized that we could not take the firm to new levels without taking our team members to new levels.

This article will focus on **Pride – A Leader’s (and an Individual’s) Greatest Problem**. I want to thank Dr. John Maxwell for permitting me to use and pass on to others the great leadership concepts he provides through his monthly mentoring leadership growth series, **Maximum Impact** (www.maximumimpact.com). John points out there are two kinds of pride:

1. **Good Pride: Dignity, Respect, Honor**
2. **Bad Pride (false pride): Conceit, Arrogance, Independence**

Our subject deals with number two, bad pride, that can destroy a potential good leader and in time the organization that he/she leads. Dave Anderson points out that there are many reasons managers fail. “For some, the organization outgrows them. Others don’t change with the times. Some spread themselves too thin and work long and hard, but not smart. Many abandon the priorities and disciplines that once made them great and never get back to them. A few make poor character choices. They look good for a while but eventually discover they can’t get out of their own way. Increasingly, more keep the wrong people too long because they don’t want to admit they made a mistake or have high turnover become a negative reflection on them. Some failures had brilliant past track records but started using their success as a license to build a fence around what they had rather than continue to risk and stretch to build it to even higher levels. **BUT ALL THESE CAUSES FOR MANAGEMENT FAILURE HAVE THEIR ROOTS IN ONE COMMON CAUSE: PRIDE. IN THE SIMPLEST TERMS, PRIDE IS DEVASTATING. I’M NOT TALKING ABOUT THE PRIDE ONE HAS IN THEIR WORK OR THEIR ACCOMPLISHMENTS; I’M INDICTING THE PRIDE THAT INFLATES YOUR SENSE OF SELF-WORTH AND DISTORTS YOUR PERSPECTIVE OF REALITY.**” (emphasis added).

– Dave Anderson

When you look at pride, notice the middle letter is “I.” When you are full of pride on the inside, it makes you stiff, stubborn, and creates strife with others.

Maxwell says that envy is the deadly sin of **inferiority**, while pride is the deadly sin of **superiority**.

Pride causes problems, big problems. Maxwell discusses nine problems that occur from false pride and provides six ways to correct the pride problem.

1. Pride stops us from building a team.

The Big Picture Principle: "The entire population of the world -- with one minor exception -- is composed of others."

INDISPENSABLE MAN

Sometime when you're feeling important;

Sometime when your ego's in bloom;

Sometime when you take for granted,

You're the best qualified in the room.

Sometime when you feel that your going

Would leave an unfillable hole;

Just follow this simple instruction,

And see how it humbles your soul.

Take a bucket and fill it with water,

Put your hand in it up to the wrist;

Pull it out and the hole that's remaining,

Is a measure of how you'll be missed.

You may splash all you please when you enter,

You can stir up the water galore;

But stop and you'll find in a minute,

That it looks quite the same as before.

The moral in this quaint example

Is to do just the best that you can;

Be proud of yourself, but remember

THERE'S NO INDISPENSABLE MAN!

From personal experience, I've seen first-hand how false pride can destroy a leader's potential. While there are many reasons a leader may fail, false pride is a sure cancer to leadership.

2. Pride renders us unteachable.

Your pride tells you that you know it all and thus you don't commit to personal growth. There's always something better to do with your time and money, and since your ego convinces you that you've arrived and have all the answers, who needs personal growth books or seminars?

3. Pride closes our mind to feedback.

Stephen Covey states "It takes humility to seek feedback. It takes wisdom to understand it, analyze it,

and appropriately act on it."

Honest feedback on your performance is difficult to come by when you are the leader. However, Ian Harvey, CEO of London-based BTG, PLC, uses this approach: He asks the senior managers on his executive committee to tell him...

Two things he should stop doing.

Two things he should keep doing.

Two things he should start doing.

4. Pride prevents us from admitting mistakes.

The leader will not say "I blew it."

Pride is at the bottom of all great mistakes.

-- John Ruskin

The Duke of Wellington once haughtily drew himself up to his full height and thundered to one of his staff officers, "God knows I have many faults, but being wrong is not one of them!" (Does this remind you of anyone?)

When People fail, they generally respond in one or more of the following ways:

They blow up.

They cover up.

They speed up.

They back up.

They give up.

-- John Maxwell's book *Failing Forward*

Don't waste energy trying to cover up failure. Learn from your failure and go on to the next challenge. It's okay to fail. If you're not failing, you're not improving.

-- H. Stanley Judd

5. Pride keeps us from making changes.

Pride will cause you to pledge allegiance to the status quo rather than be open to change; especially if the change alters something you put into place. Since you have more emotional equity in the way things are, you'll justify living with them rather than changing them.

6. Pride encourages poor character choices.

Because of arrogance, ignorance, or a little of both, leaders start taking shortcuts that compromise their values. In their conceit, they think they're above the rules or are too smart to get caught because pride is a character flaw. (Enron?)

7. Pride hinders us from reaching our potential.

Dad always said you could fall off the same ladder you climbed up on.

-- Hank Aaron, *I Had A Hammer*

Maxwell points out the Six Temptations of Successful Organizations

1. The leaders of successful organizations stop working on themselves.
2. The leaders of successful organizations stop thinking big.
3. The leaders of successful organizations stop leading from the front.
4. The leaders of successful organizations stop developing others.
5. The leaders of successful organizations stop holding others accountable.
6. Everyone in successful organizations abandons the basics.

Many problems in business are caused by the ego interfering with judgment.

8. Pride destroys relationships.

The opposite of loving others is not hating them but rather being self-centered.

The point is that each person's pride is in competition with everyone else's pride. It is because I wanted to be the big noise at the party that I am so annoyed at someone else being the big noise... Now what you want to get clear is that Pride is essentially competitive, is competitive by its very nature, while the other vices are competitive only, so to speak, by accident.

Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man. We say that people are proud of being richer, or cleverer, or better looking than others. If everyone else became equally rich, or clever, or good looking, there would be nothing to be proud about. It is the comparison that makes you proud: the pleasure of being above the rest.

-- C. S. Lewis

9. Pride distorts your perspective of reality.

It's like the beaver told the rabbit as they stared up at the immense wall of Hoover Dam, "No, I didn't actually build it myself. But it was based on an idea of mine."

-- Charles H. Townes,
Nobel Prize winner in laser technology

The name, Enron, has become a household word. It has even been altered from a noun to a verb as some people use it to describe a personal scam, i.e., "I got Enroned." The fallen corporate giant certainly speaks to the issue of pride, but this piece is about a major stockholder known for his arrogance. Although he lost billions, he still has money to spare as he is a third generation heir to the family fortune. Concerning this man's pride, one consultant described him like this: "He is a man who was born on third base and thinks he hit a triple." It's hard to find a better description of pride.

-- Hoston Chronicle, 12/9/01, p.2D

How to Correct the Pride Problem

1. Recognize your pride today.

If anyone would like to acquire humility, I can, I think, tell him the first step. The first step is to realize that one is proud. And a biggish step, too. At least, nothing whatever can be done before it. If you think you are not conceited, you are very conceited indeed.

-- C. S. Lewis

2. Admit your pride today.

Benjamin Franklin once said that "there is perhaps not one of our natural passions so hard to subdue as pride. Beat it down, stifle it, mortify it as much as one pleases, it is still alive. Even if I could conceive that I had completely overcome it, I should probably be proud of my humility."

3. Express your gratitude today.

A proud man is seldom a grateful man, for he never thinks he gets as much as he deserves.

-- Henry Ward Beecher

You should keep a grateful journal – don't concentrate on what you don't have.

4. Say your prayers today.

"Lord, when I am wrong, make me willing to change,
And when I am right, make me easy to live with."

5. Laugh at yourself today.

Blessed are they that laugh at themselves,

They shall never cease to be entertained.

-- Chinese Beatitude

Recognize your pride and the problem with it. Do something about it. If you want to influence others in your workplace, you must act in a way that others can embrace both you and your ideas. Never forget -- **We will be remembered for the value we have added to others, not the value we have added to ourselves!**

Until the next time –

THINK ON THESE THINGS!

-- Phil

(Phil was the founder of the Knoxville law firm of Wimberly & Lawson and retired from active practice on December 31, 2004. Phil has lectured and taught widely on a variety of aspects of labor, employment law, leadership and personal growth.)

