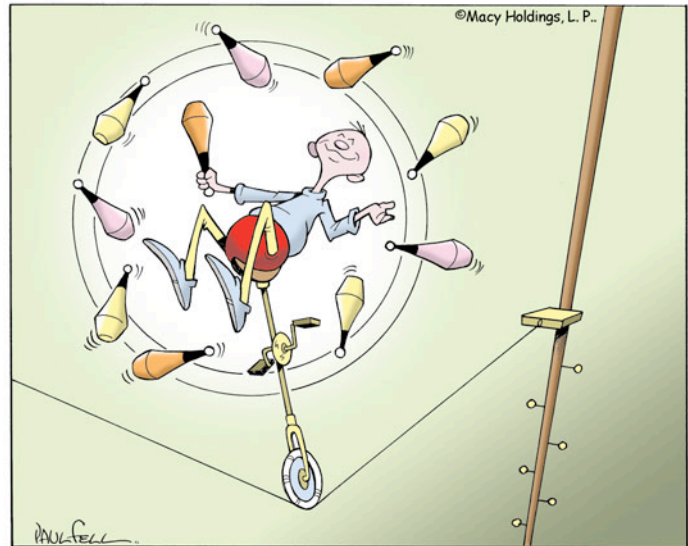


The Power of Balance

Of all the traits and characteristics of effective managers and leaders, the very most important one is recognizing and leveraging the power of balance. Those who truly excel have learned that balance is the secret ingredient that acts as a booster rocket to carry performance to the high altitudes.

What image comes to mind when you think of balance? A tight rope walker carrying a long rod as he inches along a taught rope high above the ground? Two kids on a teeter totter, pushing their feet against the ground as their end comes down? Your check book when the bank and you agree on how much money is in your account? A competitive swimmer rhythmically pulling his arms over his head and into the water while finning his legs in sync?

What do these examples have in common? Well, think of the kids on the teeter totter. How do they both get off of it when they're ready to quit? One gets off and holds the teeter totter steady to offset the weight of the other. The up and down motion is stopped by having equal weight or force on each end. A point of equilibrium is reached around the fulcrum. The tight rope walker and your check book (assuming you and the bank agree) also represent a point of equilibrium or balance. *And then what?* Energy becomes reinvested in the kids getting off, in the tight rope walker gingerly taking another step, in your being free to spend more of your bank balance, in the swimmer lapping within her swim lines. ***When the imbalanced state is given up, a new possibility opens.***



So, what's that got to do with your business? Simple. The same principle holds true at work. Perhaps this is easiest to see by some examples of the lack of balance. I currently have a consulting client who is in a major turf war with his counterpart in another department. Both managers are new to their positions. Each has a view of their rightful responsibilities which are supposed to be compensatory, but unfortunately they are both claiming to own some of the same responsibilities. The last week has been full of e-mails flying back and forth with multiple parties drawn in to the debate by having been copied. Each manager is only seeing his own point of view, not the system in which they are both a part. That's imbalance.

Another example. One of my colleagues in a private corporation deeply wanted to quit and start her own business. She had a unique, valuable product she wanted to put out on the market. She investigated every aspect of her idea and found highly an encouraging prognosis of the viability of this business. Yet, to move ahead with this business, she would have to give up the security of her comfortable corporate salary and benefits. She went back and forth, back and forth, spending several years before she finally left during a downsizing, having lived all that time in the discomfort of indecision and wasting precious time to market of her product.

Or, how about this one? Two large US manufacturing companies, former competitors, had merged, and a new manager was sent into a plant of the former rival. The new manager had come from a culture of flat structure and collaborative management. The plant, however, had been hierarchical since the day it was founded. The new manager wanted to restructure and hoped to gain consensus among his new direct reports for the new structure. His new leadership team quickly polarized, some advocating continuation of the former hierarchy in order to give quick, unambiguous direction. The other side wanted to give vent to pent-up staff frustration of being treated like mushrooms. The two camps struggled for six months without resolution, each side becoming more entrenched with every management team meeting. Performance of the plant was down due to the lack of cooperation stemming from resentments each side held toward the other. They were stuck, recycling the battle on a weekly basis.

In each of these cases, energy is imbalanced. People's perceptions are catawampus and off-centered. Both sides feel very passionately that their way of seeing things or their sense of the way forward is correct. They are willing to fight for their way. Perhaps as you've read these examples or as you ponder them your own poignant examples of imbalance have emerged, some from your work history, some from today, some concerns for tomorrow.

What's the answer to these distracting imbalances? ***See the whole picture.*** It's very hard for people to hold a partial view – the hallmark of imbalance – at the same time that they are aware of the full picture. Immerse the disputing sides in a full sense of the big picture with equal weight given to each side, and the partiality can't maintain itself. In holding the whole picture, the balance between the disputing sides becomes apparent. The kid getting off the teeter totter holds the plank down in order for the other kid to get off. They then go off and play at a new game. So too with your group, ***wholeness absorbs dissonance. Energy released from the imbalance is available for reinvestment.***

About D. Beth Macy, Ph.D. – *The common thread throughout Dr. Macy's work history has been change. Throughout most of her work life, she has been a manager or leader dealing with organizations experiencing difficult issues. The types of organizations she has lead, managed or consulted with have varied from small to large, private to public, non-profit to profit, health care to manufacturing. Early in her career, Dr. Macy's curiosity about effective change lead her to achieving masters and doctorate degrees in management focusing on organizational behavior and organizational theory. Developing her own competencies first as a manager and as a leader, she then shifted to her long-time aspiration of coaching and consulting other organizational leaders.*

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