

## I'm alright, it's the others

**You can't build a career by blaming those around you for any failure to perform. Assuming leadership implies taking responsibility for what your team delivers. You lose credibility with your boss if you blame your team, and it's hugely demotivating. Break out of the blame culture.**



This is a simple concept with quite a complicated twist. Let's keep it simple first. What do maintenance engineers do when they go out on a call to an upset customer? They have a survival instinct that compels them to look around for someone else to blame.

They blame the product – you know how it goes. 'Oh no it's an R567I, they're buggers to fix. Look at this, when they brought out the new model they saved money on the controls by altering the old ones rather than bringing out new ones. That's why it's so difficult to use. See, if they had put that there you would have been able to change the settings like that.' Or they blame the company. 'Under the

Here's an  
idea for  
you...

**Most people wait to have their authority increased before they take on new responsibilities. This is slow-lane career thinking. Find something in your organisation that needs fixing and just do it. If you don't have the authority and your action plainly has a good result then you have probably expanded your responsibilities. (You may have to smooth a few ruffled feathers, but so what?)**

old management I would have been here two days ago like you wanted. But since the merger, they've cut back you see. Frankly, the lists I get in the mornings need another bloke. But they won't listen.' And so on.

Now let's take this one stage further. It's quite easy for an account manager with an external customer, or a liaison manager running the bridge between two departments, to develop a close relationship with his opposite number. They're close because that's the way the organisations want it. The problem comes when something goes wrong. In this instance a

good liaison officer will take responsibility, keep in close touch with his customer and put his own time and energy into solving the problem. There is a temptation, however, for the customer to try to keep the friendly relationship going by diverting her accusations towards another part of the organisation. 'Look, Ken, it's not your fault. We've always known that this was a bit of a grey area for the company. They never really solved the whole problem and that's why this has happened.' Sometimes she'll go even further and suggest that you keep a low profile while she deals directly with the department who will eventually fix the problem. This is dangerous talk, and the manager who falls for it is actually behaving in the same way as the maintenance engineer.

Now let's push the phenomenon up to higher levels of management. I once had a boss who was completely disloyal to his team. When things went wrong he failed to act as the essential link between the person with the problem and the member of his team responsible for coming up with an answer. He used me to give people bad news. I gave presentations of our plan when he was not sure what the high-level reaction would be. On one occasion he put me into a very difficult discussion that ended acrimoniously. He then worked out another way of doing things that met all the objections and, of course, presented that himself.

I thought he was getting away with it until his boss, the sales director, put his arm round me one day and told me that he had noticed that I seemed to be in the front line when the bullets were flying and my boss was only around when the battle was done. That was very useful. I now had a direct line to the director and he regarded my loyalty to my boss and my endurance in tough situations as good news for my career. My boss, he regarded as a maintenance engineer.

**If you are looking for clues about using that direct contact with the director have a look at IDEA 32. *Help the aged.***

Try another idea...



**'A man who enjoys responsibility usually gets it. A man who merely likes exercising authority usually loses it.'**

MALCOLM FORBES, publisher

Defining idea...

How did  
it go?

**Q I was in a negotiation and trying to do what you suggest, keep my first offer to myself until as late as possible. What do you do if the other side keeps asking for your offer, and appears to be getting waxy?**

*A You will probably have to make your offer. Try asking them questions that help to reveal their own estimate; but in the end you have to answer their questions. Some people make it a rule to answer the second time someone asks the direct question.*

**Q My negotiation was going very well. We had agreed salary and all of the minor points, and I was about to summarise when my boss suddenly introduced another element. She said that all was well provided I agreed to take on a person who nobody in the organisation wants because he's impossible to manage. I was tired and due to meet my boyfriend half an hour before this bombshell, so I gave in. What was the alternative?**

*A You've half answered your own question. It doesn't matter how tired you are. When this happens (it's called a late hit by the way) you have to take it seriously and find the time to talk about it and get it removed. You should have told her that you had to take a ten-minute break to phone your boyfriend and put him off for the evening. Yes, the evening. This shows her that she can't give you the bum's rush on this. During the break consider the late hit as an opportunity? I mean if you successfully manage the unmanageable, think of the glory. Also, during the break, think out how she can help with the problem person. Once you have got a few concessions from her, take the person on willingly. Come on, you'll work out how to deal with the bastard.*