

---

CHAPTER

1

# Don't Be a Wimp!

---

COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL

## Peering into the PC Cesspool

WCMH-TV in Ohio reported that Glendening Elementary School, in Grovesport, has banned celebrations of Halloween, Christmas, and Valentine's Day, in part because a few deprived students don't participate in these holidays due to their personal beliefs. The kids at this gulag will no longer be able to play dress-up, eat candy canes, or exchange valentines because goose-stepping killjoys say they need the extra few hours a year spent in these parties to improve academic results.

Furthermore, they've also eliminated individual birthday parties in favor of one big birthday orgy, where everyone's special day will be celebrated. If the wimpy wardens at this elementary prison were truly interested in improving grades they'd support rather than oppose teacher competency testing, and hold their weak-stick teachers to a higher standard. These kids don't need more hours of schoolwork to improve their grades—they need more competent teachers who can do their job and who aren't allowed to hide their inadequacy behind tenure or their union.

*Business Lesson:* Today's school systems are breeding a generation of future workplace wimps who will be ashamed of their unique abilities, maintain no sense of competitive spirit, and grow up believing it's okay to put the needs of a few whiners ahead of what's good for the majority. Unfortunately, many caring and competent teachers and bright stu-

## Don't Be a Wimp!

dents suffer under this oppressive system of lowering the bar to accommodate the few. By the time many of these under-achieving students enter and infect the workforce they'll be next to worthless, and little you can do will rehabilitate their politically correct illness.

You are well advised to take good care of the employees you already have and talk them into a long career with your organization, because if something doesn't change to rekindle the merit-based, competitive spirit that once symbolized our school systems, much of this future crop of kids won't be worth hiring. In the meanwhile, if you have children of your own, here are five words of advice to help better prepare them for the real world: private schools or home school.

## Defining the Wimps

Wimps are defined by the *Oxford Dictionary* as weak, feeble, or ineffectual people. Leadership wimps are those whose feeble and ineffectual style has caused them to assume a "too-tolerant, anything goes, everyone is beautiful, tell 'em what they want to hear, let's not rock the boat" leadership philosophy. This leadership style finds a welcome host in politically correct times. Yet it is terminal for any leader who is serious about getting sustainable results in today's business climate. If you or your employees have it you'll need to ditch it fast, and assume more of the four traits promoted in this chapter.

A key differentiator between average and effective leaders is the ability to adapt their leadership style to fit the individual, the circumstances, and the times. Adapting your lead-

## IF YOU DON'T MAKE WAVES, YOU'LL DROWN!

ership style doesn't mean you try to become someone you are not, although some leaders are so inept that becoming someone else would probably save their career.

What adapting your style *does* mean is leveraging the most relevant traits and practices necessary to get results in today's PC climate, and doing so more often. In most cases this will mean dispensing bigger doses of accountability and tough love.

Examine the following four traits of politically incorrect leaders. Consider which adjustments you should make in your leadership style in order to maximize outcomes in a politically correct cesspit that insists that you get fast results but mandates that you produce them with kid gloves and within the parameters of PC protocol.

### **Trait One: Politically Incorrect Leaders Discriminate**

Discriminate? Yes, discriminate. I'm not advocating discrimination according to race, gender, or ethnicity. Instead, politically incorrect leaders discriminate in favor of talent, work ethic, and results, and discriminate against laziness, complacency, and mediocrity. This type of discrimination is not illegal. In fact, it's quite necessary to build an elite organization. And as offensive as this will sound to society's advocates for misfits and dullards; politically incorrect leaders give their best to the best and less to the rest. They understand that in a meritocracy, treating everyone fairly doesn't mean you treat them all alike; treating people fairly means you treat them in a manner they have earned and deserve based on past performance; they haven't all earned, nor do

## Don't Be a Wimp!

they deserve, the same discretion, opportunities, resources, amount of your time, work schedules, or compensation.

In a meritocracy, fairness doesn't mean sameness; fairness means justice, and justice means giving people what they earn and deserve. In fact, the only people in your business who might have a problem getting strictly what they earn and deserve are the slugs who haven't earned and don't deserve much. And if these vagrants get mad enough about your distribution of resources they might just really make your day and quit, saving you the trouble of firing them.

If the last sentence appears brutal, please remember that this book is not designed as therapy or amusement. It's written to equip you to maximize your leadership results and perhaps save your job or your company in the process. Your mission is to get better and to lead at a higher level. Your job is to either get your people better or get better people, and if you don't get or can't accept or execute this basic yet vital principle, you shouldn't be in a leadership position. Don't take it personally; this doesn't mean you're a bad person. It simply means you're unfit to run a lemonade stand. I'm aware the last sentence or two haven't been very motivating. This is because my time is better spent irritating you into action than trying to sweet talk you into it. Sorry, but desperate times call for desperate measures.

Following are three examples of how leaders and organizations used discrimination to maximize results:

- A. Jesus: The easiest question I am asked in seminars or interviews is, "Who do you believe was the greatest leader of all time?" The answer is—Jesus. If this answer offends you for any reason, lighten up and look at the

## IF YOU DON'T MAKE WAVES, YOU'LL DROWN!

facts. What He accomplished in just three years of ministry, without official power or title, is without equal. He built a team, lead by example, and walked His talk. He created clarity and vision, exemplified straight talk and accountability, displayed a servant's attitude and intense sense of humility, all the while staying engaged in the trenches, avoiding perks and privilege that traditionally come with such acclaim. He also discriminated.

While Jesus had a primary team of twelve, He didn't spend equal time or energy with all. He invested most heavily in three: John, James, and Peter. The Bible reports that when Jesus ascended the mountain to be transfigured He didn't bring the whole team. He chose these three to accompany Him. He wasn't worried about offending the other nine. He brought the same three on special healing missions and into a secluded part of the Garden of Gethsemane to pray with Him the night of His arrest. From the cross, He gave John and His mother responsibility for one another.

After the Resurrection, Jesus gave Peter special attention and let him redeem his denial. The result of focusing on His highest potential disciples is as follows: James pioneered Christianity in Spain, and preached so boldly and effectively when he returned to Jerusalem that he was the first disciple martyred. John preached tirelessly, wrote one of the four Gospels, the book of Revelation, and three letters of the New Testament. A resurgent Peter helped validate and assimilate Paul into the Christian movement, preached the breakthrough sermon at Pentecost, helped bring Christianity to the Gentiles, and wrote two New Testament letters. Peter's own disciple, Mark, wrote another of the Gospels.

## Don't Be a Wimp!

Jesus knew He had but a short time to make His mark and build the team that would establish His church after His death. He chose and invested most heavily in an inner circle of three to catalyze the mission. For this He didn't need to explain Himself or apologize. He did what was right and not what would have been more acceptable to the group.

B. Jack Welch. Jack Welch was chairman of General Electric for 20 years. While he led GE to explosive heights he set high expectations, gave brutally honest feedback, held people accountable for results, and developed leaders at all levels. He also discriminated. Not only did Welch invest exhaustively in the development of GE's high potentials, he also fired the bottom 10 percent of performers annually. Welch didn't suffer fools or bottom-dwellers for long. He knew their mediocrity would infect GE's culture, diminish their standards, lower morale, break momentum, and impair his own credibility.

When you worked for Welch you knew where you stood: If you stunk you knew it, and if you were great you knew that as well, and were treated accordingly. It doesn't get any fairer than that.

C. Frequent-buyer programs. Programs like airline frequent flyer clubs are examples of merit-based discrimination. Not all customers are treated alike. It doesn't matter which race, gender, or ethnic background you possess, the rules are simple: Those who spend the most money get preferred check-in, first class upgrade privi-

## IF YOU DON'T MAKE WAVES, YOU'LL DROWN!

leges, and free trips as a reward for their performance. Hotels use the same strategy. The more often you stay with them the higher your level of preferred status. In return you earn late checkouts, free upgrades to suites, and complementary nights, among other perks.

The once-a-year traveler is not going to get the same treatment at a Marriott or Hilton as the customer who routinely does business with either company. And that's exactly as it should be. Interestingly, you hear few complaints concerning the discrimination that corporations bestow favor upon their best customers, but whiners in the workplace squawk when their own bosses project the "give your best to the best" strategy to enrich top performers. Yet the same philosophy is at the root of each approach. After all, both groups, frequent buyers and top performers, add more value and put more dollars into the organization's coffers. Discrimination is both appropriate and necessary to advance the enterprise.

## Hard-Charging Strategies

Someone once said that people are your greatest asset. That someone didn't tell the whole story. People are not your greatest asset; the right people are. The wrong people are your greatest catastrophe, and mediocre people are your greatest drain on resources. Bearing this in mind, consider the following:

1. You will never build a great organization around marginal people. Working with weak people drains you.



## Don't Be a Wimp!

Investing in weakness at the expense of leveraging strength breaks your momentum, lowers morale, and misuses resources. It causes you to play endless games of catch-up.

Some of the people you're retaining shouldn't be on board in the first place, because they're just plain bad at what they do. And even if you manage to invert bad you don't get good: You just get not bad, and how far do you think you can take your organization with a troupe of "not bad" bunglers? It's time to face reality about your people and to stop seeing them as you'd like them to be. Some of them have too far to go. They're failing, and even if you improve them the opposite of failing is not excellent; it's merely passing. And as I recall, passing grades in schools started with a D-, and you rarely, if ever, bring a D- up to an A. The lesson? You cannot build an elite company if you spend priority time with problem people. Instead, you must spend priority time with "potential" people. Otherwise it's like going to a horse race and betting your life savings on a nag, just to improve its self-image; seemingly noble but ultimately stupid.

2. In the midst of PC times it takes courage to discriminate. Do you have it? If not, you had better find it. When you clearly define up front what you stand for and what you expect, and hold people accountable for their actions, you needn't worry about shyster blowhards coming by with a news crew to accuse you of discrimination in order to blackmail you to fund their hypocritical lifestyle. Why? Because you'll be engaging in ethical discrimination: absolutely legal and necessary.

## IF YOU DON'T MAKE WAVES, YOU'LL DROWN!

As a politically incorrect leader you have an obligation to invest your time and resources where you receive the greatest return. You can't afford to try and be everything to everyone and shouldn't waste your time trying to make everyone happy. Not only is this impossible, it's not important. Get people better and then they'll get happy. And if getting better doesn't make them happy, get some real help.

### **Trait Two: Politically Incorrect Leaders Blow Up the Box**

President Kennedy once said, "Conformity is the jailer of freedom and the enemy of growth." Business leaders should pay heed to his words. Rather than follow the herd, get out front and leave footprints. Don't just optimize; innovate, and take the risks necessary to gain an edge on your competitors.

When you blow up the box you'll make mistakes, but take solace in knowing that going 7 for 10 is better for your business than going 3 for 3, because if you're going 3 for 3 you're playing it too safe. You're so busy grabbing the low-hanging fruit that while you may not make many errors, neither will you have a breakthrough.

In a world enamored with "best practices," resist conventional thinking and consider it the realm of wimpy and obsequious followers; the unthinking, expendable sheep that live their lives by seeing a moving line and getting in it rather than thinking for themselves. The annals of business and history are filled with gutsy leaders who blew up the box, created an edge, won it all, and left mere scraps for the play-it-safe, politically correct laggards to fight over. They lived as Thoreau declared: "If a man does not keep pace with his

## Don't Be a Wimp!

companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away." The following politically incorrect leaders not only heard a different drummer, they turned the orchestra upside down.

- A. *Ronald Reagan*. For 40 years, conventional wisdom said no country could win the Cold War. President Reagan disagreed. Employing an uncommon blend of optimism and determination he defied his opposition, played to win, and demonstrated that 40 years of stinking thinking could be overcome by a leader who rejected conventional poppycock, raised his sights, lived his convictions, and didn't blink when things got tough.
- B. *Herb Brooks*. Conventional wisdom said that the students comprising the 1980 U.S. Olympic hockey team could never compete in the Olympics, much less win against the Soviets, who happened to be the best team in the world. U.S. coach Herb Brooks disagreed and decided to make waves. He reinvented the team's conventional philosophy, work ethic, and playbook, and then whipped the world at Lake Placid, winning a gold medal and sending his detractors and doubters home to ponder their miscalculations. Those who lived during this time will never forget the incredible lift and pride this victory brought Americans, as we agonized under economic malaise and our citizens were held hostage in Tehran.
- C. *John Wooden*. Conventional wisdom deemed it impossible to win seven consecutive championships in any sport. Yet, John Wooden led the UCLA men's basketball team to reach this unequaled streak, and went on to

## IF YOU DON'T MAKE WAVES, YOU'LL DROWN!

win 10 national championships in 12 years. He worked in relative obscurity at UCLA as a coach for 15 years, refining his unconventional practice systems and coaching philosophy, mastering vital recruiting strategies before launching onto the scene and winning his first championship in 1964. And he did so without recruiting violations, without throwing chairs or belittling players.

- D. *Abraham Lincoln*. Conventional wisdom says you could never have a nervous breakdown, suffer two business failures, and lose numerous elections and still be elected President of the United States. Abraham Lincoln persevered and became one of the greatest leaders in world history by leveraging politically incorrect leadership at one of America's most crucial moments. His detractors called him an ape and unworthy of being president. He didn't look like a president, sound like a president, or have a pedigree. But today the entire world knows Lincoln, while his severest critics sleep in graves of anonymity.
- E. *Mel Gibson*. Conventional wisdom says you'd have to be crazy to spend 25 million dollars of your own money to produce and distribute a movie every major Hollywood studio turned down—and then spend another 25 million of your own funds to publicize it; especially if the movie is in Latin and Aramaic and violently portrays the crucifixion of Jesus, polarizing Hollywood, Jewish activists, and the secular establishment. But Mel Gibson heard the beat of a heavenly drummer, put his money and convictions where his mouth was, thumbing his nose at Hollywood's conventional thinking, faded the heat,

silenced his critics, and stunned the world as *The Passion of Christ* raked in over \$600 million dollars and became the ninth-highest grossing movie of all time. Even with all the bleeding heart hype that promoted Michael Moore's masterpiece of misdirection, *Fahrenheit 911*, five times as many people saw *The Passion of Christ*! If you were paying attention, this disparity portended the 2004 presidential election results.

## Hard-Charging Strategies

To evaluate your leadership in the areas pointed out in this section, answer the following:

1. Have you become so conditioned by precedent that you have a difficult time thinking in the box, much less stepping outside of it? When is the last time you tried something for the first time?
2. Is innovation welcome in your organization, or is the premium placed on being right so strong that no one dares think bold and new? What differentiates you from your competition? If you can't be specific, you're in trouble—because without differentiation the only tool you'll have to earn a client's business is the lowest price. Whereas the more you differentiate, the less price sensitive people become.
3. What industry dogmas have you challenged lately? In most industries everyone looks at the same things and ignores the same things: What makes you different?

## IF YOU DON'T MAKE WAVES, YOU'LL DROWN!

4. What dream or strategy is buried inside you because you fear failure? Do you understand that most people go to the grave with their best music still in them—and that when they die it is as though they never lived? You must do better. Politically incorrect leaders take a stand, determine to stand for something great, and identify what they're no longer willing to stand for.
5. Do you resist the need to have large numbers of people endorse your dreams? After all, most people live average lives at best, so why worry about what they think? In fact, most don't think at all. They just bob their head to whatever palaver they hear that best validates their own mindset and character. If you've done your homework, have summoned the conviction, and are willing to pay the price and see your dream through, then get moving. In the words of Goethe, "Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius power and magic in it."

In today's politically correct climate Goethe would have had to write: "Whatever you can do or dream, be sure it doesn't offend anyone else or hurt their self-esteem, and then ask all your friends to vote on it, and if they can't decide, take it to the geniuses at the U.N., where it will meet death by delay."

### **Trait Three: Politically Incorrect Leaders Hold Others Accountable for Results**

Holding people accountable for results doesn't mean you have to yell, demean, belittle, or disrespect others. In fact, if you do these things you deserve a politically incorrect beat-

## Don't Be a Wimp!

ing. Your efforts are much more effective when you explain your expectations and the ensuing consequences for failure clearly, firmly, and respectfully. Being direct is not an excuse for being a jerk or inflicting abuse.

*Accountability Rule #1:* Start with yourself. Before you can even think about holding others accountable, you must walk your own talk and assume responsibility for your personal results—or lack of results. In other words, suck it up and look in the mirror first before you look out the window and try to fix the rest of the world. Accept responsibility. Admit your mistakes. Hold yourself to a higher standard. Don't be a hypocrite. Adulterers don't give fidelity lectures. The French don't conduct courage clinics and the Enron crooks don't write on ethics.

Rudy Giuliani nailed the essence of self-accountability when he said: "I don't deserve all the credit I received for what went right while I was mayor, or all the blame for what went wrong, but I do deserve to be held accountable for the results of my office." Rudy Giuliani's quote doesn't tell the whole story concerning his leadership philosophy. On his desk was a sign: "I am responsible." The same goes for you so put away your black belt in blame when things turn south.

*Accountability Rule #2:* A second aspect of accountability is clarity. Many leaders do a poor job with accountability because they don't set clear performance and behavioral expectations up front. Thus, they have no benchmark for accountability. After all, ambiguity is the enemy of accountability.

If you don't take the time to create clarity you can't make the time to effectively hold others accountable. Do you have

## IF YOU DON'T MAKE WAVES, YOU'LL DROWN!

clear performance and behavioral expectations in your workplace? If not, quit being lazy, put your thinking cap on and decide what you're willing to stand for and what you're not willing to fall for. Then communicate these expectations so clearly and often that you take away all excuses of ignorance from your people: "I didn't know that's what you wanted," "I wasn't sure that was what you meant," "I didn't realize that's what you expected," and the like. Following is a list of what I refer to as the Business Facts of Life. As you consider these twenty-five politically incorrect expectations, determine how many of them are relevant to creating the clarity you need in your business. Use these Facts of Life as a catalyst to creating a clear benchmark of expectations in your business.

### The Business Facts of Life

1. It's okay not to like a part of your job but it's not okay not to do it. In fact, I don't expect you to like everything about your job. That's why we pay you to do it. If you loved everything about your job we'd have to turn the workplace into an amusement park and charge you admission for being here.
2. Everyone on this team has a voice, but that doesn't mean you get a vote. This is not a democracy. I will listen, but I will also decide.
3. Everyone will be held to the same high standard of work ethic, customer care, and character. Beyond that, I will treat you in a manner you have earned and deserve and will invest my time and resources accordingly. I will give



## Don't Be a Wimp!

my best to the best and less to the rest. I will run a meritocracy, not a welfare state.

4. You are expected to prove yourself over again every day. Tenure, credentials, and years of experience don't substitute for results. No one is paying you to pace yourself or budget your efforts.
5. I will work with you as long as you continue to make measurable progress in reasonable time. However, if you reach a point where you hover at or below average performance levels with no upward trend, I will lose interest in you. I do not endeavor to become a savior of lost causes or immerse myself in endless rescue missions.
6. I not only expect you to work hard on the job, I expect you to work hard on yourself. If you don't grow, you go. The day you stop bringing something of value to the table is the day I no longer have use for you.
7. My pay plan, bonuses, and incentive programs will reward above-average performers and above-average results, only. I will not subsidize or legitimize mediocrity by rewarding unworthy performances.
8. When promotions are available, they will go to the most qualified member of the team, regardless of longevity, gender, or ethnic background. I'm running a business, not a Royal Family. I have created an environment hostile to an affirmative action mindset. If the most qualified candidate for promotion is a white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant male, he will get the job. On the other hand, if it is a physically challenged woman of color, the job goes to her.

## IF YOU DON'T MAKE WAVES, YOU'LL DROWN!

9. I expect you to focus on what you can control; never assume a martyr's mindset to explain away your lack of success. Regardless of outside conditions, your inside decisions will determine your success. Even in the worst of times you can control your attitude, your discipline, and your character choices, and I will expect you to do so.
10. I measure loyalty by performance, not the number of years you cash my paychecks. The most disloyal thing you can do is to stop getting results. Loyalty is not the amount of time you put in; it's what you put into the time.
11. I will give you prompt, consistent, and brutally honest feedback on performance. If you are great, I will tell you. If you are failing, I will tell you. If you are ever unsure of where you stand, ask me.
12. I expect you to choose the truth over harmony. Make the right decision, not the cheap, popular, easy, or convenient one.
13. You are to lead your people deliberately and avoid doing what comes naturally. If you are having a bad day, suck it up and bear it. Don't put it on your sleeve and wear it or share it. Since everyone you work with has their own problems there is no need to share yours.
14. I will train you and invest in your development, but I also expect you to invest in yourself. In fact, if you don't invest in yourself, why should anyone else?
15. I expect you to lead by personal example, not personal convenience. This means you must commit yourself to a cause and not commit the cause to yourself. The day

## Don't Be a Wimp!

you put your personal agenda ahead of the teams' is the day you must leave my organization.

16. If you lie, cheat, or steal I will fire you. There will be no second warning.
17. I expect you to add value to others on your team. Be a giver and not just a taker. If you are in it just for yourself you're in a mighty small business.
18. When dealing with others I expect you to practice one rule: the Golden Rule. This is not an option.
19. If you have personal problems that affect your work, I will listen, advise, and try to help you. However, you are expected to work through the paradox of solving your personal problems while you continue to get results on the job. Personal problems should not be construed as license for an indefinite production holiday.
20. I expect you to become brilliant in the basics of your job. You don't have to do anything extraordinary on a daily basis. Just do the ordinary things extraordinarily well.
21. I expect you to learn from mistakes and continue to take shots, even when you miss. When you hit a wall, learn to bounce, don't splatter.
22. I expect you to avoid repeating the same mistakes. While mistakes are a good investment when you learn from them, repeating the same ones evinces a carelessness that I will not tolerate.
23. I expect you to become an "and then some" person. Do what is required and then some. Hit your numbers and then some. Keep your promise and then some.
24. Don't whine, gossip, or complain on my time.

## IF YOU DON'T MAKE WAVES, YOU'LL DROWN!

25. I don't tolerate skunks that make the numbers. Thus, I will measure you by two metrics: performance expectations and behavioral expectations. Not only do I expect you to perform the technical part of your job well, I expect you to share the company core values. If you make the numbers but don't live the values you are expendable.

It has been said that the first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. That's exactly what the business facts of life accomplish in your organization. They lift the fog off your expectations and provide a benchmark for accountability which is vital when you build a meritocracy. After all, it's hard for your people to be aggressive when they are confused about what you expect. Defining clear expectations takes the emotion out of having to deal with offenders later, because you made what was expected quite clear.

There are two key reasons leaders fail to create clarity for their organization: laziness and cowardice. Laziness explains itself, but by cowardice I mean that politically correct leadership wimps who'd rather be well liked and popular than hold people accountable for results don't create clarity, because they know if they never lay on the line exactly what they want there won't be as much pressure on them to confront the wrong behaviors when they manifest.

## Three Lessons in Politically Incorrect Accountability

1. During the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln proved an ideal boss. Humble yet decisive, driven while support-

ive, he laid out clear expectations for his generals and then got out of their way. However, he did not bond with blunderers for long. In the 3-year period from the war's inception until the appointment of Ulysses S. Grant as General in Chief, Lincoln fired, demoted, or reassigned six key generals due to their inability to get results.<sup>1</sup> These pompous, incompetent knuckleheads were responsible for the loss of thousands of lives. Lincoln didn't let public opinion sway his resolve to do what was right. Some of the men he removed or sidelined were popular with the public and with the troops—they simply couldn't deliver the knockout punch to a vastly outmanned Confederate force.

Lincoln cared only for one thing: victory. He wasn't attached to sentimentalism, beholden to tradition, or affected by petty politics. What a contrast to modern-day political putzes, who spend more time polishing their soiled image and lying until our senses dull rather than making the tough decisions necessary to make a difference. No leader in American history has had to lead under such trying circumstances as did Lincoln. Ten days before he took the oath of office in 1861 the future Confederate States of America seceded from the Union.<sup>2</sup> To worsen matters, Lincoln was elected by a minority of the public vote, and was viewed by his own advisors as a geeky bumpkin with no leadership experience.

Opponents were mistaken to confuse his gawkinsness for weakness. This leader meant business and cared not whether he was liked or hated. He held himself accountable, spending more days out of the White House during the Civil War than he did inside, as he visited generals at battlefields on numer-

## IF YOU DON'T MAKE WAVES, YOU'LL DROWN!

ous occasions to gain first-hand knowledge and make a personal impact on his subordinates, personally coming under sniper fire at Ft. Stevens in Silver Spring, Maryland, while surveying Confederate troops.<sup>3</sup>

2. UCLA men's basketball coach John Wooden was on his way to leading the Bruins to a 30–0 season and their first of 10 national championships in 1964. In the final game of the season, after having a brilliant year, center Fred Slaughter was playing an awful game. In fact, as time progressed he went from bad to worse. Shunning sentimentalism, Wooden pulled Slaughter and replaced him with Doug McIntosh, and allowed McIntosh to finish the game. To exacerbate the agony, Wooden knew dozens of Slaughter's friends and relatives were in the stands, since they were playing where he had attended high school.

Wooden made many such decisions in his remarkable career, never confusing leadership with popularity. The coach also knew that respect must precede popularity in leadership, and his tough decision and politically incorrect manner was validated when he reached the locker room after the game and was met by Slaughter, who had been waiting for him: "Coach, before someone gets the wrong impression, I want you to know that I understand. You had to leave Doug in there because he played so well, and I didn't. I wanted to play in the worst way, but I do understand and if anyone says I was upset, it's not true. Disappointed, yes, but upset, no. And I was very happy for Doug."<sup>4</sup>

## Don't Be a Wimp!

Politically incorrect leaders understand that when they make the right decision rather than the convenient decision, they win and so does the team. Wooden said at one time:

*Fairness is giving all people the treatment they earn and deserve. It doesn't mean treating everyone alike. That's unfair, because everyone doesn't earn the same treatment. That's why I didn't treat all players alike. I didn't treat Walter Hazzard like I treated Gail Goodrich. I didn't treat Bill Walton like I treated Keith Wilkes. Contrary to what you might think, it enhanced teamwork, because almost every player I coached knew that he would be treated fairly, that he would be given exactly what he had earned and deserved. They worked harder as a result. It's true in sports and elsewhere in life<sup>5</sup>*

Boy oh boy, if they'd stop suing the Boy Scouts and attacking nativity scenes long enough to read, this quote would keep the hemorrhaging hearts at the ACLU awake at night, because Wooden shined the light of truth and wisdom on the corruption of political correctness with his philosophy. This coach made tidal waves and earned 10 titles as a result.

3. When Vince Lombardi coached the Green Bay Packers he exuded political incorrectness. He was direct and demanding, honest, results-oriented, played to win, had a low threshold for idiots, and held others accountable. He earned respect, then popularity. Lombardi knew that holding people accountable didn't mean you had to demean or disrespect them. After catching Max McGee sneaking out for the third time Lombardi remarked to

## IF YOU DON'T MAKE WAVES, YOU'LL DROWN!

the perpetrator: “Max, I said that will cost you \$500 and if you go again, it’ll cost you \$1,000. Max, if you can find anything worth sneaking out for \$1,000, hell, call me and I’ll go with you.”<sup>6</sup>

Balancing respect with directness to Paul Hornung before the 1959 season:

*I know your reputation here. I’ve investigated you very carefully. You have done things you shouldn’t have done. . . . I trust you. I just don’t want you to let me down. If you do, it’ll be your ass.*<sup>7</sup>

When establishing expectations to the rookies, Lombardi balanced clarity, empathy, and directness:

*Some of you boys are having problems picking up your assignments. It’s a tough task. You got so many plays to learn, so many moves to learn. If you make a mistake, if you drop a pass or miss a block, anything like that, hell, forget it. If we had a defensive back here who felt bad every time he got beat on a pass pattern, he wouldn’t be worth a damn. Take an education, but don’t dwell on it. Don’t let it affect your play. You will drop passes. You will make mistakes. But not very many if you want to play for the Green Bay Packers.*<sup>8</sup>

## Hard-Charging Strategies

To evaluate your level of politically incorrect leadership, answer the following:



## Don't Be a Wimp!

1. Have you set a high standard of performance and behavioral expectations for yourself? If not, don't even think about trying to hold others accountable for their performance, because you cannot lead credibly when your personal bar is dropped lower than your drawers. You prove you're not a wimp or a hypocrite when you're willing to demand more from yourself than your people.
2. Do you have clear performance and behavioral expectations for your team? Do you hold one as sacred as the other? Are those standards high enough? If not, people will tend to live down to them. It's not your job to make people feel warm and fuzzy with a soft set of expectations. Your job is to stretch people, not to maintain them. If your expectations have become cloudy or conveniently forgotten, it's time to redefine them for your team. Until you do, holding them accountable for attaining them is unreasonable.
3. Are you committed to making the right decision—rather than the convenient decision—when holding others accountable for results? If not, you're a wimp. If you cannot detach yourself from tradition and sentimentalism, you betray the best interests of your team and the organization.
4. Do you balance confrontation with empathy? The sole objective of holding others accountable is to improve performance and help them to grow. It is not to demean, disrespect, or humiliate. If you don't grasp this you know nothing of leadership; you know only tyranny.

### **Trait Four: Politically Incorrect Leaders Keep People Out of a Gray Area.**

When you work with or for a great leader, you never have to guess where you stand. Politically incorrect leaders give people the feedback they need to know how they're doing and what they must do to improve. While Chapter 4 will deal with five different types of feedback, here we'll cover four key elements of feedback necessary to develop your people:

1. Effective feedback happens quickly after the performance. Delayed consequences are not effective. If someone does a great job and you delay in letting them know, the recipient perceives your effort as an afterthought. In fact, getting there late with feedback is often worse than not getting there at all.

Since behavioral science teaches that behaviors that get rewarded and reinforced get repeated, you must pay attention and let people know quickly when they are doing well. At the same time, you must confront people just as quickly when they veer onto the wrong path. Failure to confront a poor performance with prompt feedback, in effect, reinforces the behavior, and you're guaranteed to see more of it. To pull off the delivery of fast feedback you'll need to spend more time off your slumbering behind and in the trenches of your business, observing and analyzing what's really going on. If you have more calluses on your rear end than on your feet you'll never give feedback fast enough to improve behavior.

2. Effective feedback is consistent. Feedback is most helpful when delivered consistently, not just at monthly or

## Don't Be a Wimp!

annual reviews. Consistent feedback provides the necessary number of reinforcers required to create or improve habits and behavior.

3. Effective feedback is brutally honest. You need to be more like Dr. Phil than Dr. Feelgood. If your feedback fails to tell it like it is you will not impact the employee. In fact, you will tacitly encourage denial and delusion, and make it more difficult for them to change their behavior in the future. Being brutally honest doesn't mean you shout, demean, or disrespect. It simply means that you state the facts as you see them, without the sellout of rationalization or compromise. The difference between directness and cruelty is courtesy. Be respectful but firm.
4. Effective feedback is specific. Telling someone, "You had a great month" is a good start, but if you want to impact the employee and accelerate his or her development, point out precise areas that were executed well: "Jan, you were very tenacious with your follow-up calls last month, and it really made a difference in your results." Specificity also tells the employee you care enough to pay close attention to what he or she is doing. Being specific when offering feedback to turn around a poor performance is just as important as specificity when you reinforce the productive results of someone doing the job well.

The most effective feedback is face-to-face. You cannot effectively develop people via memo, e-mail, or voice mail. Again, this means you'll need to stay engaged with the

## IF YOU DON'T MAKE WAVES, YOU'LL DROWN!

people-work part of your job and not become so dazed by data and numbed by numbers that you descend from leader to analyst. You may recall that during the Iran hostage crisis, this style was the Jimmy Carter Rose Garden recipe for leadership irrelevance that helped cost him the election.

### Politically Incorrect Leadership Traits Summary

During a radio interview I was asked who my favorite leaders of all time were in a number of areas: sports, military, business, politics, and overall. Obviously, there are no right or wrong answers to this question. We all have favorites, and my guess is that when you recall yours, you'll see they have many or all of the four traits listed in this chapter. It's probably safe to say that the leaders you admire most didn't run around all day trying to make sure everyone was happy. I'd also bet they held followers accountable, were honest and direct in their approach, and had high standards.

I've already shared some of the same leaders with you as I did with my interviewer. I told her the leaders I admired most in the given categories were Green Bay Packer head coach Vince Lombardi for sports; General George S. Patton for military; Jack Welch for business; Abraham Lincoln for politics; and Jesus, overall. All five of these men had all four of the politically incorrect traits listed in this chapter: They all gave their best to the best; were unconventional in their approach; held others accountable for results; gave brutally honest feedback, and had high standards they stretched oth-

## Don't Be a Wimp!

ers toward. They weren't nearly as interested in popularity and harmony as they were in results.

As important as political incorrectness was to each of these men, it is even more important for you today. You lead in more challenging times than they did. Change happens much faster today, and the people you lead are more complex: They are more highly educated, more diverse, more demanding, and more entitled than at any time in history. Thus, if you don't tighten up, toughen up, and adapt your leadership style to address the hand you've been dealt, you'll get run over and rendered irrelevant as a leader. This is your wake-up call. Either step up and respond or step aside and let a real leader take charge. The shelf life for wimpy leaders is becoming increasingly and mercifully brief.

## Hard-Charging Strategies

To develop and apply the traits in this section you must:

1. Keep people out of a gray area. Otherwise, you betray them. If your people are great tell them they're great! And if they're failing, tell them that as well—then help them devise a plan to turn things around.
2. Don't worry about demotivating people by telling them bad news. You demotivate them more by keeping them guessing because you won't tell them how they're doing. Disappointment is always easier to handle than anxiety.
3. Engage your people with robust dialogue. Care enough to confront them when they're off-track and applaud

## IF YOU DON'T MAKE WAVES, YOU'LL DROWN!

them and share their victories when they do well. Feedback is the breakfast of champions. Current champions and potential champions need it to pursue their potential. If you're too indolent or indifferent to give fast, honest, and consistent feedback to your employees then I have some feedback for you: Resign before you're fired. It will look better on your resume.