

YOUR LEADERSHIP

EDGE

LEAD ANYTIME, ANYWHERE.

ED O'MALLEY
AMANDA CEBULA

Copyright © 2015 by KLC Press.

All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this publication
or portions thereof in any form.

KLC Press

Kansas Leadership Center

325 East Douglas, Wichita, KS, USA, 67202

Visit our website at www.kansasleadershipcenter.org.

This edition published in 2015.

Library of Congress Control Number:

ISBN: 978-0-9889777-5-4

Cover and layout designed by Clare McClaren, Novella Brandhouse

Cartoons by Pat Byrnes

Printed in the United States of America



CHAPTER 15
ENERGIZE OTHERS

Work Across Factions

Working across factions happens when someone holding certain values and beliefs engages productively with another with different values and beliefs.

“Productively” is the key word.

The cable news channels are filled with talking heads from across the political spectrum. The pundits speak eloquently (maybe). They each are there to represent their faction (liberals, conservatives, libertarians, moderates, extremists, etc.). No one is there to work across factions. Their interaction is reduced to mini-speeches, given to each other and their audience. Each mini-speech has the goal of trying to convince others that the speaker’s faction is right or, maybe even more likely, appealing to their own hard-liners and enforcing their already strongly held values and beliefs.



ENERGIZE OTHERS

Exercising leadership on adaptive challenges involves working across factions, not simply trying to beat them into submission.

What are factions?

Factions are groups of people who share values. They are often loyal to the same things and share a common orientation to the work before them. Factions can be political (conservative, liberal, etc.), generational (boomers, Gen Xers, company founders, new hires, etc.), geographical (rural, urban, headquarters, field office, etc.), spiritual (religious, agnostic, atheist, etc.), personality driven (introverts, extraverts, etc.), organizational (board members, staff, departments, contractors, volunteers, etc.), among many more. Why is it critical to work across factions?

One faction ruling (the country or the office) with a 50.1 percent majority is fine for technical problems. Trying to solve adaptive challenges in the same manner is a recipe for stalemate. Adaptive challenges are about values and culture. You can't impose values and culture upon other factions. They need to be crafted together. When you help diverse factions find common ground, you are on your way to making progress for the long haul.

Working across factions is hard.

Working across factions requires more time “diagnosing the situation” than we like. Working across factions starts with doing lots of work to understand the perspective of the other factions. To work across factions you need to understand their loyalties, values and beliefs. You need to imagine the situation from their point of view and do so in an authentic and honest way.

How do we start?

Once you understand where the other faction is coming from, start looking for common ground. Go for the low-hanging fruit. Generate some good will and build from there. And don't be surprised if over time you find yourself in one faction for a certain project, and then in a new faction for another.

And brace yourself for tough discussions with your own faction. They might not want you consorting with the enemy. Expect questions like, "You did what? You met with whom? And you didn't even convince them they are wrong? Who the heck do you think you are?" It can be especially hard to work across factions if you hold an authority role among your faction (e.g., the Senate majority leader or the accounting department manager). Because you have been put in that role to advocate for certain things, your faction might not like you working with the others.

WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT WORKING ACROSS FACTIONS?

Read "Team of Rivals," Doris Kearns Goodwin's brilliant biography of Abraham Lincoln and his Cabinet. Ask yourself, "How did Lincoln work across factions?"



TIPS FOR WORKING ACROSS FACTIONS

- ▶ **FOCUS ON BUILDING TRUST FIRST.** Invite someone to lunch. Don't make this too complicated.
- ▶ **IDENTIFY OVERLAPPING INTERESTS AND BUILD OFF THEM, RATHER THAN FOCUSING ON DISAGREEMENTS.**
- ▶ **HAVE A MINDSET THAT YOU MIGHT NOT BE RIGHT.** Be open to discovering new possibilities together.
- ▶ **ACKNOWLEDGE LOSS THE OTHER FACTIONS MIGHT EXPERIENCE, RATHER THAN SUGARCOATING THE SITUATION.**
- ▶ **ASK QUESTIONS.** Not loaded ones such as, "Don't you think the company will crumble if your ideas get implemented?" But sincere, open-ended questions such as: "What do you care most about in this situation? What does success look like from your point of view? What do you wish other factions and groups understood about you? What do you stand to lose if progress is made on this issue?"
- ▶ **ONCE YOU DEEPLY UNDERSTAND WHERE THEY ARE COMING FROM, START WITH "YES-ABLE" PROPOSITIONS.** List everyone who will be affected by a cause or decision.
- ▶ **ONLY AFTER WORKING HARD TO UNDERSTAND THEM, BEGIN ASKING FOR THEIR FEEDBACK ON YOUR OPINIONS.** Ask something of the other faction you are 99 percent sure they can agree to.
- ▶ **DON'T SEE THINGS AS A ZERO SUM GAME.** Pluralism is good. Don't try to annihilate the other faction. See the value in their thinking and work to blend into a shared purpose. Work together for the common good.

Lessons from History

WORKING ACROSS FACTIONS

Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru were both instrumental in India's long fight for freedom. Nehru's education and experience made him a man of the West, champion of parliamentary democracy and universal adult suffrage. Gandhi, on the other hand, had a more Eastern outlook, envisioning a society based on the life of Buddha and a village culture centered on manual work and individual sacrifice. The two were often at odds. Visions clashed. Strategies conflicted. However, they kept moving forward (differently, in the same direction) focused on what mattered most — freedom from Britain and releasing their people from the chains of poverty.



I am an associate in a law firm and currently working on a very large project with two groups of stakeholders. Each group is positioning themselves to be right and, by the way they are treating each other, clearly don't think the other party has anything to offer. What needs to be done to get us all working toward one common goal?

- FACTION-FILLED FRAN

Dear Fran,

Take a good long look at the tips above. Invite someone to lunch. Listen really well. Ask about what really matters. Then have a similar conversation with someone from the other faction. Try to identify overlapping interests. Maybe you can come up with one thing both parties can agree on. If you can't come to a yes-able proposition on your own, bring the two factions together and make the case that there is value in identifying common interests. Ask each to talk about what they care about. Then help them identify overlaps.

Onward!

