

Book Review on Bad Leadership

Joseph Martinez

Southwestern College

LEAD510 Leadership in Context

Dr. Jim Morrison

### Abstract

Great leaders do not wish for excellence, they build it. Excellence is setting the bar at the highest level and reaching it within the confines of doing what is right for your organization. To reach excellence you must first be competent and have the courage of conviction to be a leader. Organizations cannot achieve excellence without figuring out the direction it wants to go, then employing its leadership to do whatever they have to accomplish the objective. Followers then hope their leaders will have acted with competence and courage to ensure a stable foundation on which success is build on. In Barbara Kellerman's book, "BAD Leadership" she asserts that we are surrounded by bad leadership and the only way to understand it is to examine it, evaluate it, learn from it, and take action.

### Book Review on Bad Leadership

Barbara Kellerman, the Research Director for the Center for Public Leadership and a lecturer in public policy at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University authored a book called “BAD Leadership”. This book confronts the conventional philosophy that promotes the premise that to be a good leader I must have competence and courage. Her book challenges me to ask the question “what can I possibly learn from bad and dysfunctional leaders?” Many of the leadership philosophies that I have studied makes the assumption that leadership is a series of lesson that once learned, leaders become great and organizations grow and prosper. While I agree with these experts in theory, the application of a set of characteristics and principals without purpose can be easily distorted resulting in bad and misguided leadership. The lessons that I gleaned from Kellerman’s book was that the ultimate goal is to develop a workforce that can nurture future leaders to help guide their followers toward positive outcomes. This endeavor requires me and my organization to examine every aspect of human behavior that envelops leadership in all its forms. Barbara Kellerman’s book acknowledges the darker side of leadership and the problems that ensue while leading me down a path to better address issues to study by analyzing set paradigms and learning from them so that I can take action against it.

Her book is broken down into three parts; the first Part is called “The Bad Side,” it delves into human behavior and leadership with the topics of: Claiming the Bad Side, Reasons for Being Bad and Making Meaning of Being Bad. Part two is titled “Leading badly” and provides a roadmap for each of the seven bad leadership characteristics (Incompetent, Rigid, Intemperate, Callous, Corrupt, Insular, and Evil). Finally, Part Three, called “From Bad to Better” defines the consequences of bad leadership and recommends options in dealing with leadership failures

through Costs and Benefits and Comments and Corrections. I will provide a synopsis of each section starting with the “Bad Side”.

In Part one, bad leadership is examined and characterized. Kellerman asserts that when leadership is discussed, people automatically assumed that the reference is about “good” leadership. The concept of learning from bad leaders is a foreign notion, because we have been programmed to stay away from it. Kellerman has asks us to go past these safe walls to actually learn that even in bad leadership there are learned successes to be gained. She suggests that leaders have to be studied in order to find that “je ne sais quoi” in their mechanics of the application of leadership. One of the experts, Kellerman uses in her book, Lawrence Summers says:

“Nothing will matter more than the education of future leaders and the development of new ideas.” (Bad Leaders, 2004)

Kellerman looks at whether leaders used their power and control for good or whether they served their own purpose for greed. She proposes that in the past theorist have been more interested in controlling the inclination of bad leadership rather that addressing the root cause. Machiavelli’s negative example of using coercion is normally frowned upon and considered an unpredictable means of motivation. Machiavelli profoundly believed that leaders are both good and bad and felt that the latter yielded the best results. Thus the advice he solicited to the prince to employ cruelty against his people. A case can be made for the temporary results of a philosophy of force although, the long-term effects of team build and development far out way those strategies.

In chapter two, “Reasons for Being Bad,” she offers a view of leadership through the

perspective of historical leaders and their impact on the people that followed them. English philosopher Thomas Hobbes was quoted as saying in the book:

“People in their natural state are rapacious and aggressive” (Bad Leaders, 2004)

Hobbes’ contention was similar to that of Machiavelli in which he believed in an aggressive style to control the masses. Although Machiavelli’s advice to use force for compliance seemed self-serving, his interest was to secure the power of his monarch’s leadership. Kellerman also explains why leaders behave badly and why we follow the lead of those people. She touts that when the leader cannot control their personal desires and act upon them, the results is bad leadership. The disturbing part is her analysis as to why followers would behave badly.

Kellerman says self preservation and a deep seeded need for safety, simplicity and certainty. I, have personally succumb to the desires of a bad leader to avoid conflict and position jeopardy.

When I am in the grasp of a bad leader, I adopt a philosophy of cooperate and survive, because I knew that the leader would be eventually fired or promoted either way he would have been gone alleviating the impact on my work life.

In chapter 3, Kellerman offers a model to make sense of how poor leadership evolves and the meaning behind it. This construct plots the incarnation of bad leadership by categorizing it by ineffective leadership and unethical leadership. Her model advocates that the rational is derived from practical application verses a theoretical concept. My analysis is that the unethical behavior of leaders can be viewed as a category five hurricane. The conditional on-slot is a result of a combination of rotating winds, increased oceanic waves, and varied air pressures. Similarly, the unethical behavior that a leaders indulge in occurs when an amalgamation of a divers dynamic factors interact between leaders (rotating winds), followers (increased oceanic waves), and the

situational circumstance (air pressure), merge by a critical trigger event that pulls everything into it. Just as a hurricane is unpredictable and may injure people, cause property damage and destroy institutions the consequences of the unethical leadership behavior can damages leaders, followers, and the organizational environment. The preponderance of the book outlines the seven different categories of bad leadership using models from our modern climate.

During a crisis, how would bad leaders perform on the job as opposed to good leaders where others relied on them to lead them out of the situation? If the world is crashing down on the operation and possessing strong leadership skills are required, will the information Kellerman's expounds be enough to get the job done to save the day? I believe Kellerman's character markers are there to be a wakeup call to leaders that are asleep at the wheel of the Titanic that they built. This book has made me take a second look at the leaders in my organization to see if they are exhibiting dysfunctional characteristics that will eventually lead us to failure. In a study of weak leadership failures, Kellerman reviews seven types of dysfunctional leadership characteristics: Incompetent, Rigid, Intemperate, Callous, Corrupt, Insular and Evil. By categorizing these types she was able to analyze what not to do as a leader and what the organizational followers are doing to reinforce a leader's dysfunctional style. She says by studying these characteristics we learn how not to strengthen the weak leaders. The seven types of bad leadership are:

1. The "Incompetent" leader and their followers lack the will or skill to sustain effective action; such as the International Olympic Committee Chairmen, Juan Antonio Samaranch.
2. The "Rigid" leader and their followers are stiff, unyielding, and unwilling to adapt to new

ideas, new information or changing times. An example would be a leader in the United States Military

3. “Intemperate” is the leader that lacks self-control and is aided and abetted by followers who do not intervene. Former New York Governor Eliot Spitzer is a good example of this.

4. “Callous” is the leader type that is uncaring or unkind; they ignore or discount organization, or stakeholder needs; former Sunbeam CEO, Al Dunlap reflects this characteristic type.

5. William Aramony, former head of United Way of America was the “Corrupt” type of leader that would lie, cheat, or steal his way to the top position putting his interest above all else.

6. Bill Clinton, former U.S. President is an example of an “Insular” leader: he disregarded or minimized the health and welfare of those outside the core group.

7. Radovan Karadzic, former leader of Bosnian Serbs, is undoubtedly the reflection of an “Evil” leader. Some leaders and their followers commit atrocities and/or tragedies.

In the next few chapters Kellerman discusses characteristics of each type of bad leadership and offers real-world examples, learning from various sects of society, different countries, and cultures. Among them are the former head of the International Olympic Committee Juan Antonio Samaranch; the former head of Sunbeam, Al Dunlap; and the former head of The United Way of America, William Anthony.

Chapter four in the book is a Top 10 laundry list of bad leadership, each discussing its respective bad leadership style. In this chapter Kellerman’s assessment of “Incompetent”, offers a review of the leadership styles of Juan Antonio Samaranch, president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), who was disgraced because of the accepted levels of corruption among IOC members. She also highlights former president of Indonesia, Abdurrahman Wahid,

who after his unpredictable leadership style, conflicting policies and irregular behavior was thrown out after 22 months in office. This chapter is reflective of leaders that have exceeded their skill set capability for running an organization.

Chapter five discusses the characteristic “Rigid” by looking at the leadership styles of Mary Meeker. She was a Morgan Stanley Dean Witter & Co. opinion leader on Wall Street who ignored verified indications that the 1990s technical boom was coming to an end yet, continued to recommend stock to their stakeholders long after they had become toxic. When power is centralized, it is likely to be misused, and that puts a premium on delegation and collaboration. Because she would not share power and worked alone without flexibility, her advice negatively affected the financial decisions of many people.

"Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men." (Lord Action, 1887)

The military relies on a detailed structured hierarchy of leadership in order to function under chaotic conditions. Military leaders use ridged authoritarian, style to provide direction for their subordinates and meet the organizational goals.

In chapter six, Kellerman talks about “Intemperate” the leadership styles of Marion Barry, former Mayor of Washington, D.C., who was tainted by drug use scandals. Her discussion focused on Berry, but she emphasized the importance follower’s play in a leader’s success or failures. She identifies how followers enabled bad leaders. For instance, when discussing Barry as an "intemperate" leader, Kellerman looked at his family and close associates who not only enabled him, but could have stopped his fall from grace which led to his incarceration for use of

illegal drugs. She also talked about Jesse Jackson, a politician stained by sex scandals and televangelist James Bakker, who was also involved with corruption. My analysis of this trait is the leader's utter lack of self control and their desire for money and the accompanying greed. These things have ended more than a few normally seeming sane leaders' careers. Their lack of self control involves power and the desire for more distorts those already in positions authority. The leader's lack of self control can go as far as to involving sexual conquest and the need for immediate self-gratification seeming to trump all common sense and moral and ethical bounds. Another example of an intemperate leader is Eliot Spitzer, former Governor of New York resigned in the wake of the exposure of his involvement as a client in a high-priced prostitution ring.

Chapter seven focuses on the characteristic of "Callous". It embodies the leadership styles of Al Dunlap, former CEO of Sunbeam Corporation who due to the short sighted way he managed corporate restructuring created a debacle for Sunbeam's stake holders' and employees. Some leaders on the surface may appear to be callous by not going along with the will of the collective, but may only be issue related. This is a common occurrence with military leaders because of the violent nature of the profession. Rudolph Giuliani, former Mayor of New York City, changed the city's perception of him. He may have been seen as callous and unresponsive to members of the minority community in New York City. Guiliani was working a case involving a shooting by the New York City Police. In Kellerman's analysis, she asserts that Giuliani was callous in his relationship with the African-American community and that the case brought the issue to a head and illustrated a high degree of callousness. In a personal example with this type person, in my early life I worked for a retail clothing store. The store manager was very difficult to work for because it was hard to find a way to accomplish various tasks that was

acceptable to him. No matter how hard I worked he was very detached from the employees and did not care about anything. Unless the issue directly affected him, everything else was invisible to him. His callous behavior eventually resulted in him being demoted and having to work for his assistant. This was the rare time that the leader's leader was able to intercede in a situation and fix the mistake. Many times the callous leader does immeasurable damage to the organization.

In the book, chapter eight centers on being "Corrupt". Kellerman contends that the leadership styles of William Aramony, former head of the United Way, who was forced to resign because of his accounting and management practices is an example of corruption. As a nation we have always had a trusting relationship with the leaders of charitable organizations, it very disheartening to us when those leaders abuse our trust in something that exists to provide a service to society. We are ready to support them when they are presumed to be good, but when they fail, we terminate our relationship with them. Kellerman said this about charitable leaders:

"Expectations are high and tolerance is low."(Kellerman, 156)

Leaders lead by example. The result of corruption is damage to the organization. Once a corrupt leader engages in bad behavior, the unit is alienated. In some cases other team followers will want to resort to similar behavior as the leader because the practice is seemingly condoned by the top. During the 2010 Haiti earth quake, Haitian-born musician Wyclef Jean came under intense scrutiny over alleged mismanagement of his Yele charity. He was asking American's for donation to help the people of Haiti, but when the reports of financial misconduct at Jean's Yele charity surfaced, it threw a negative light on Haiti's relief efforts drying up the funding for him supporting Kellerman's quote. She also addresses other examples of corrupt people like the former mayor of Providence, Rhode Island, Vincent Cianci, who was convicted of racketeering

and former Enron CFO, Andrew Fastow, who contributed to the failure of Enron. To hit home the point that it can happen anywhere.

In an analysis of chapter nine it details the attributes and examples of an “Insular” leader. I think that this type of person builds boundaries between their followers and themselves. To the insular type leader, human rights are less important than the needs and wants of their people, organization or country. Kellerman describes this as the leadership style of Lee Raymond, president of the Exxon Mobil Corporation, who failed to engage or demonstrate concern for anyone outside Exxon Mobil. She also uses former president of the United States, Bill Clinton, who failed to respond to the crisis in Rwanda to illustrate an example. I also believe President Obama falls within this category when dealing the 2010 Louisiana, British Petroleum oil spill. While those that are close to the insular leader may not actually have to endure direct shrapnel from their actions, the real cost is paid by others that are kept at a distance.

Chapter Ten is the “Evil” perspective and details the leadership method of Saddam Hussein, The Late Iraqi president who was responsible for murder, torture, genocide, ethnic cleansing and use of chemical weapons against his own people. Kellerman perspective on Evil:

“Evil Leadership- The leader and at least some followers commit atrocities. They use pain as an instrument of power. The harm done to men, women, and children is severe rather than slight. The harm can be physical, Psychological or both. (Kellerman, 2004)

Evil leadership is connected to the commission of atrocities. These leaders use pain to obtain and maintain power. Followership plays a primary role in evil leadership. The threat and application of severe harm is fundamental to evil leadership and the attributes are linked to evil leaders such

as: The first president of the Bosnian Serb Administration, Radovan Karadzic. He allowed and endorsed the genocide of Muslims, Jim Jones and David Koresh, cult leaders and dictators, who caused or contributed to the deaths of their loyal followers under the guise of religion. I have seen in some organizations cultivate and reward villains, thugs and hoodlums masquerading as leaders. My observations as to why some environments seem to produce an abundant amount of these dysfunctional characters are that the organization shows no visible sign of values in action. The company values might be in their company hand-book outlining expectations, but other than that, there are not any actual teeth of enforcement behind those words.

In Part Three, "From Bad to better," Kellerman discusses the organizational impact from the Costs and Benefits and Comments and Corrections chapters. She proposes suggestions as to how to deal with bad leadership. When dealing with cost benefit comparison we look at the core competencies of the leader. We as followers make decisions based on a straightforward breakdown of costs and the benefit we get from that investment for what we intend to engage in. From the follower perspective we need to be cognoscente of the team climate and gage how it could affects us. The significance that I gleaned from this part was that leadership is situational. Even though I may have control of some appropriate skills for organizational behavior management, they may not be appropriate for every application. Every leader needs an adaptable arsenal of effective skills to lead. To help the leader develop and grow requires the follower to take responsibility for the success within an organization and translate that back to the leader. Keller says:

"Bad leadership will not, cannot be stopped or slowed unless followers take responsibility for rewarding the good leaders and penalizing the bad ones." (Kellerman,

2004)

To look at the follower does not relieve the leader of responsibilities. Kellerman develop a leader's self-help list of principals that will help balance the charge of leadership. First she say to limit your tenure, share power, don't believe your own hype, get real and stay real, compensate for your weaknesses, stay balanced, remember the mission, stay healthy, develop a personal support system, be creative, know your appetites and be reflective. Almost everyone is engaged in a continual reflection of their actions. I suggest bringing Kellerman leaders perspective to the forefront when heading an organization. When analyzing other leaders, I think it is appropriate to evaluate the leadership character traits or skills of successful leaders and emulated them. The followers in an organization should question their commitment to the purpose of the organization and potential costs that would result for failures by enablement of a dysfunctional power chain.

I started this analysis off on a question of "what can I learn from bad and dysfunctional leaders?" Through Barbara Kellerman's book I know that there is an ethical line that separates right and wrong and somewhere on that line some leaders cross over to the wrong side. Kellerman examples of these bad leaders show that even though these people stepped across, the rest of us can learn where they went wrong, so that we are not doomed to repeat their mistakes. The other point that resonated with me was that we as human beings have the propensity to learn and improve. Once we identify the manifestation of Kellerman's faulty characteristics we have the capable of switching back to the right path. Recognizing these traits in others becomes a bit more difficult because we as followers enable the bad leadership and blur the ethical line when it has been crossed for self preservation. To be able to categorized bad leader markers, Kellerman developed seven types of dysfunctional leadership characteristics and gave examples of known

leader within our world that exhibited those characteristics. My final analysis of the book as a whole is that it equipped me with the knowledge that I can learn something from everyone. I felt that there were too many real-world examples for each characteristic, but the end result served the purpose. Kellerman said:

“If we pretend that there is no elephant and that bad leadership is unrelated to good leadership...we will in the end distort the enterprise. We cannot distance ourselves from even the most extreme example Hitler by bestowing on him another name, such as “power wielder”. Not only was his impact on twentieth-century history arguably greater than anyone else’s, but also he was brilliantly skilled at inspiring, mobilizing, and directing followers. His use of coercion notwithstanding, if this is not leadership, then what is?” (Kellerman, 2004)

“Bad Leadership” enabled me to get past stereotyping barriers that inhibit my seeing past the black and white of her message. Reading this book will contribute to real dialogue, which I believe is the goal to success. A positive outcome from reading this book is that it can increase situational awareness of followers to shape our organizational future.

References

Kellerman,B (2004). *Bad Leadership*. United States: HBS.