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that can spark creativity and innovation.**

by Saj-nicole A. Joni and Damon Beyer

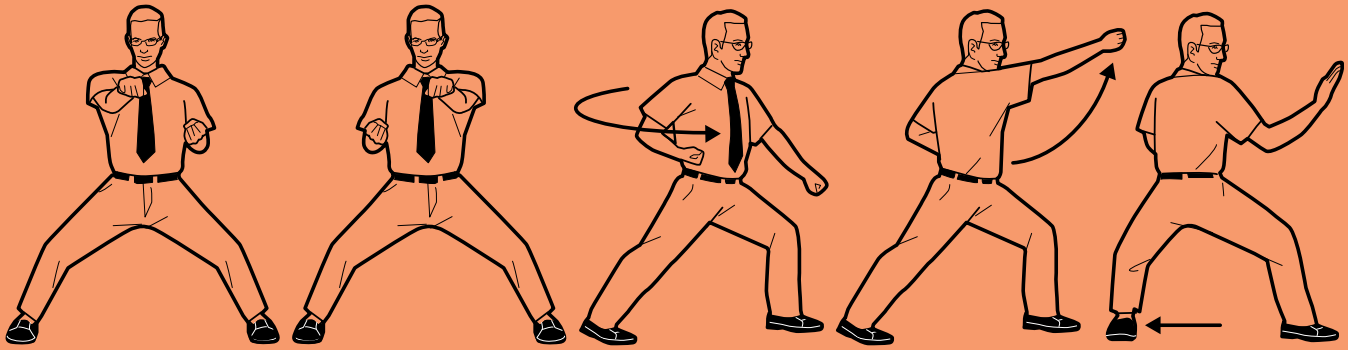
How to Pick a Good Fight



Strong leaders create the kind of conflict that can spark creativity and innovation. | **by Saj-nicole A. Joni and Damon Beyer**

WHEN DICK FULD took over at Lehman Brothers in 1994, he inherited a contentious culture. Traders and investment bankers would not share ideas and competed for business, putting their own interests above the firm's in nearly every instance. In Fuld's own words, published in *Knowledge@Wharton* in 2007, "The early Lehman Brothers was a great example of how not to do it. It was all about me. My job. My people. Pay me." But by the mid-1990s, the financial services industry had shifted toward an integrated sales model, and such blatant disregard for teamwork didn't fly any longer. Fuld made unity and collaboration priorities at the firm, nudging them along with employee incentives. By the time of its collapse, in 2008, Lehman reportedly had one of the strongest cultures of teamwork and loyalty on Wall Street. As *Fortune* had noted in April 2006: "Fuld has incongruously turned Lehman into one of Wall Street's most harmonious firms."

Jason Lee



The effort to eliminate discord at the firm had backfired. Lehman's board of directors and management team became too agreeable – and too loyal, content to follow even when they knew better. In 2007 and 2008, numerous signals indicated that the firm was heading into a crisis, but insiders who paid attention to them were afraid to point out the elephant in the room. It turned out that loyalty meant loyalty to Fuld, according to accounts from former employees. That loyalty led Lehman executives to an almost willful blindness. Nobody wanted to disrupt the peace.

The problem is that a peaceful, harmonious workplace can be the worst possible thing for a business, according to consultancy eePulse, which conducts in-depth surveys that measure employee engagement. Complacency, in fact, is the single greatest predictor of poor company performance. The second greatest? An environment in which employees are overwhelmed. In the first case, employees are reluctant to rock the boat. In the second, the level of employee satisfaction is low and the amount of

dysfunctional fighting is high. In both situations, low energy levels and fear of political fallout curb action that might address any looming crisis. At Lehman, many alumni told us, raising difficult questions could kill your career.

Most leadership experts argue that the best way to manage change is to create alignment, but our research indicates that for large-scale change or innovation initiatives, a healthy dose of dissent is usually just as important. Within an acceptable range of competition and tension, science shows, dissent will fire up more of an individual's brain, stimulating more pathways and engaging more creative centers. In short, more of what makes people unique, innovative, and passionate is available for use.

Many successful companies are known for their stressful work environments. Microsoft, in its early days, had one of the most contentious, high-strung, and fast-paced corporate cultures in the United States. Bill Gates and Steve Ballmer were famous for yelling

at people. Food distributor Sysco, an unusually successful company built on roll-ups and acquisitions, dismisses district managers who don't meet annual productivity targets – a pretty tough standard for an operating company with thin margins. Market leaders Goldman Sachs and McKinsey are notoriously competitive, hard-driving places to work. Not places you'd go if you were looking for polite and equal regard for all voices.

We've seen this phenomenon play out over and over in our work advising CEOs and senior executives. (Full disclosure: We have done consulting work for some of the companies described in this article.) So it's time to stop candy-coating what's taught to executives and their direct reports. It's time to stop pretending that conflict-free teamwork is the be-all and end-all of organizational life. It's time to own up to the truth that the right balance of alignment and competition is what pushes individuals and groups to do their best. It's time to push employees into the right fights.

Let's be clear – alignment is important. But the purpose of alignment is not harmonious agreement. It is to sustain an organization's ability to fight for what really matters, and to pull everyone together again once the fight is resolved.

Which Fights Should You Take On?

Not all kinds of conflict promote a successful corporate environment. We have all seen organizations that were poisonously political. We have all watched otherwise rational people go to extreme lengths to sabotage their colleagues or to retaliate against fellow employees who offended them in some way. And we have all seen people fight dirty when they believed that straight shooting wouldn't get the job done. Those kinds of fights are purely destructive – and are not what we recommend. Conflict is healthful only when people's energies are pointed in the right direction and when carried out in a productive way.

Not all issues merit a fight. We've identified three principles that will help you choose the right battles:

Make it material. Before starting a fight, be sure that the stakes are high enough to motivate employees. Fight only over issues with game-changing potential. No matter how conflict averse they may be, most people are willing to fight for things they truly believe in. A fight is material if it creates lasting value, leads to a noticeable and sustainable improvement, and addresses a complex challenge that has no easy answers.



IDEA IN BRIEF

» **A peaceful, harmonious workplace can be the worst thing possible for a business. Research shows that the biggest predictor of poor company performance is complacency. Conflict can shake things up and boost your staff's energy and creativity.**

» **Not everything is worth fighting over, however. Before girding for a battle, make sure it involves an issue that affects the future and has game-changing potential. And if your fight has a noble purpose – if it's about, say, improving the lives of customers – that's even better.**

» **It's also critical to make the fight fair. Opponents should have an equal shot at winning.**

» **Leaders should structure fights through the formal organization but allow contestants to use informal connections. Good leaders also will help the losing parties turn their pain into opportunities for development.**

A good future-facing fight has three qualities: It speaks to what is possible, it's compelling, and it involves uncertainty.



In the mid-1990s, Charlie Feld, a former CIO at Frito-Lay who formed an IT consultancy, got into a material fight for his first major client. It was a railroad then known as Burlington Northern (BN), which became Burlington Northern Santa Fe after a 1995 merger. When Feld visited BN, he was shocked at the state of its scheduling systems. In his words: “I used to be able to tell you where every bag of Doritos was in the country, and BN lost *locomotives*. How is that possible? They’re big, smelly, and they sit on a track with only a limited number of places where they can go.”

One of the key problems was that BN was running trains using processes and systems designed for hauling coal and grain. It didn’t make much difference to the coal or the corn whether the train showed up on Monday or a week from Monday. But it made a difference to then-chairman and CEO Jerry Grinstein, who had a big vision for the company.

Grinstein wanted to expand its intermodal business and compete with truckers to transport international cargo containers from U.S. ports. Knowing that the U.S. economy would increasingly rely on imports, Grinstein planned to turn BN into a gateway for Asia. If you’re picking up containers from shipyards and delivering them to factories, you have to be able to commit to a schedule. You have to know where every train is at all times and where every train will be in the coming weeks and months. For clients moving coal and grain, an unpredictable schedule was offset by the cost advantages of shipping by rail, but the weakness of BN’s systems was a major drawback with intermodal shippers. The fight was material because the status quo was a barrier to growth.

Feld had to declare war on the existing systems. One of his first steps was to reorganize the company’s siloed systems into one centralized operation. IT professionals who’d been responsible for designing routing systems identified with their silos, however, and revolted against the idea. But if they couldn’t or wouldn’t get with the program, they

were out of a job: Feld replaced more than 80% of BN’s top IT managers in his first 90 days.

The next big battle for Feld and Grinstein was persuading the company’s conservative board to approve an investment of more than \$100 million in an 18-month overhaul of the company’s technology infrastructure – a staggering sum for BN, double its usual annual IT budget. They also fought to bring in a high-powered team of outside IT professionals, who had very little railroad experience, to map out and build effective scheduling systems.

We can state confidently that it was a right fight. At the company today, GPS trackers on rail cars allow dispatchers to keep tabs on trains’ locations, direction, and speed. After fueling significant growth for a decade, BNSF’s intermodal business is large and profitable and continues to gain share from truckers in everything from UPS Christmas shipments to cars off Toyota’s Asian assembly lines. And the railroad has fundamentally repositioned itself against its closest competitor, Union Pacific Railroad. Though their stocks were at nearly identical points in 1994, BNSF’s stock price has almost tripled and is currently 40% higher than Union Pacific’s.

Focus on the future. Forget the past and power struggles that are history, and don’t bother apportioning blame. Leaders in viable, vibrant organizations spend most of their time and energy looking at the road ahead, not in the rearview mirror.

That’s easier said than done. Our research shows that senior leadership teams around the globe typically devote 85% of their time to the wrong fight. They examine their past numbers, try to figure out what went wrong or dissect what went well, and assign blame or recognition – but they spend virtually no time talking about the future. They waste energy, brainpower, and resources that they could instead be investing in future returns. If business leaders could redirect the conversation so that people spent even half their time talking about the future, companies could see incredible improvements in performance.

The most common mistake leaders make is going from the “we missed our numbers this quarter” past to the “so we’re going to cut our costs to make up margins” present without stopping to set a clear context for a worthwhile future. Such an approach often sends performance into a death spiral. Though it’s OK for executives to engage in a moderate fight about short-term results, they should do so only in the context of a plan for long-term success.

A good future-facing fight has three qualities. It speaks to what is possible, shifting the debate away from what happened to what could happen. It is compelling, focusing people so intently on real, achievable benefits that they are willing to work through any associated costs and controversies. And it involves uncertainty, because if things are certain, there’s no need to fight.

When Rolf Classon first became a CEO, at a company in the health care industry, he quickly found himself in a major future-facing fight, a royal battle that would significantly affect the future of an approximately \$40 billion business. At the time, the company was considering a sizable acquisition in a sector where it already had a small presence. The deal had been vetted and set into motion by the former CEO and his leadership team. If completed, it would create a new entity capable of dominating the sector. But in Classon’s first few weeks on the job, a member of his senior team privately confided that he was unsure it was the right move, and it was keeping him up at night.

Classon realized that his colleague’s honesty had taken a lot of courage, so he decided to take another look at the proposed acquisition, though opening the inquiry would be tricky. How could he make it clear he was looking for a genuine answer, not just a ratification of existing opinion? How could he avoid alienating the executives who had championed the deal? After conferring with a few other executives and finding that some also had private doubts, Classon knew he had to act.

His board supported him, and over several long weeks the executive team conducted a loud and heated debate. The division head who would have integrated the acquisition was furious; he’d been working on the deal for a long time, and it meant a great deal to his career. Classon took pains to make sure the division head had not only a voice in the fight but also access to the board, essentially giving him permission to go around the usual hierarchy. Classon also actively solicited many opinions and refrained from taking a side before it was time to

ASSESSMENT TOOL

WHEN TO PICK A FIGHT

How do you know when an issue is worthy of a fight? With your team, state the issue as specifically as you can and then ask a series of questions, structured around our “right fight” principles. If an issue passes each stage of the test, it merits a right fight.

come to closure; he made it a point to be a scrupulously fair referee.

In the end the company decided not to pursue the deal, despite the likelihood of positive financial results, because the move wasn’t a great fit with the firm’s strategic objectives. But the fight had been fair. Classon kept his team focused on future possibilities, instead of allowing them to fixate on all the work that had gone into preparing for the acquisition. He asked the division head who would have overseen the acquisition to take over another major division – an assignment that made it clear that Classon valued and respected him and that stopping the deal was not a vote of no confidence.

The fight was compelling because it helped the leadership team improve its shared understanding of the firm’s strategic direction. And it was certainly conducted in the context of real and consequential uncertainty. Classon was new to the CEO role, didn’t know the territory intimately, and had only weeks to research and make a decision about something vital to the organization. What enabled his success was his genuine curiosity, his commitment to open and dissonant dialogue, and his focus on building strategic intent into sustainable reality. This fight paid off handsomely. Within the next two years, a much more strategic opportunity appeared. Had the company acted on the first one, it would not have had the cash or bandwidth to do the deal that ultimately repositioned it for healthy long-term growth.

Pursue a noble purpose. Make your fight about improving the lives of customers, for example, or changing the world for the better. The right fight connects people with a sense of purpose that goes

1 MAKE IT MATERIAL

VALUE Does the fight involve something that has the potential to...

- >> save 15% or more of your resources or time for a year?
- >> allow you to charge at least 10% more than you now do?
- >> grow your sales or share of customers faster than the market?

If you answered yes at least once, the fight passes the value test. But if not, you should either restate the battle in bolder terms or address the issue with traditional alignment tools like quarterly plans.

COMPLEXITY Can you resolve the issue by...

- >> relying on routine processes and common skills?
- >> calling in an expert to solve it for you?
- >> holding different people or parts of your organization accountable for separate pieces of the problem?

If you responded yes at least once, the issue probably isn't that complex and doesn't justify the stress of a right fight.

However, the fight will pass the complexity test if you answer one of the following questions affirmatively:

Does resolving the issue require...

- >> careful balancing of multiple perspectives?
- >> different people to lead the process at different times?
- >> mutual accountability for the answer?

If the issue passes the value test but not the complexity test, try to settle it in a routine fashion.

CHANGE Will the solution require...

- >> the organization to work in a fundamentally different way?
- >> a new way to integrate big-picture perspectives with specialized local knowledge?
- >> new real-time information flow between different parts of the organization?

If you answered yes at least once, the change warrants a right fight. If your answers were all negative, it's probably time for a task force, not a fight.

2 FOCUS ON THE FUTURE

POSSIBILITY Is the issue about...

- >> sorting out the details of what happened in the past?
- >> determining blame or accountability for the organization's current circumstances?

A yes answer to either question is a red flag. Right fights should speak to what is possible, not what is past.

To see if an issue passes the possibility test, ask the following:

Do we have an opportunity to...

- >> avoid the mistakes of the past and improve current circumstances?
- >> choose a course that increases the possibility of success?
- >> find the best way to turn a vision into a reality?

CHARISMA Does the opportunity...

- >> require that significant innovation take place?
- >> create a vision that is exciting enough to get people to take risks and embrace change?

One yes answer here means that the possible benefits are real and achievable enough to compel people to work through the costs and controversies associated with a right fight.

UNCERTAINTY Does the issue in question...

- >> require you to respond to wild cards like new regulations or dramatic economic shifts?
- >> demand a response to unexpected changes in customer preferences, disruptive technologies, or channels?
- >> present choices where the best way forward is not clear?

If you answered affirmatively at least once here, a right fight is appropriate. But if the way forward is obvious, debate will just slow you down.

3 PURSUE A NOBLE PURPOSE

CORPORATE VALUES Does the challenge...

- >> speak to more than making money?
- >> reflect a larger cause that is central to your organization's mission?
- >> flow directly from the values of the organization?

If you can't answer any of these questions affirmatively, see if you can translate an uninspiring objective into something more noble.

URGENCY Will the process of solving the challenge...

- >> motivate employees to go above and beyond their ordinary responsibilities?
- >> generate plans that people throughout the organization can embrace?
- >> seem important enough that people are willing to dissent?

The more affirmative answers you get here, the more likely it is that people up and down the organization will work to find the best solution.

RESPECT Will a solution to the issue...

- >> win respect and admiration from stakeholders outside the organization (including opponents)?
- >> produce an outcome that the average worker will be willing to bring up with friends?
- >> generate positive external press or recognition for the group?

At least one yes here indicates that you have a noble purpose. If you've gotten this far, your challenge has all the makings of a right fight.

beyond their own self-interest, unleashing profound collective imagination and abilities. A good fight isn't just about money or profits.

When Doug Conant left his job as president of Nabisco to take on the CEO role at Campbell Soup in 2001, he stepped into a wrong fight. Campbell was one of the world's poorest-performing food companies, and its managers were consumed by infighting over who was to blame. They were also exceptionally focused on the present – aggressively slashing costs to counter declining performance, to the point where they were systematically cheapening the brand, eventually even taking the chicken out of the chicken soup.

Such cuts were perfectly sensible in the short term; they raised the company's earnings and cooled some of the heat coming from Wall Street. But they had disastrous implications for the long term; a once-revered brand began to rapidly lose its appeal. Sales faltered and the dismal numbers continued.

Conant understood that his immediate priority was to manage the internal and external tensions the company was facing, while fundamentally rebuilding employee morale. In his first 90 days he set out to create what he called a broad "tapestry of expectations," so everyone in the organization could know where the company was going. Working with his leadership team, he wrote a mission statement that defined Campbell's purpose as "nourishing people's lives everywhere, every day." Revenues and margins were and still are unassailable priorities, but this noble purpose became the company's true north.

To help the company realize its new purpose, Conant needed to restore alignment and foster productive debate. An early step was to rearrange the organization into a matrix, so that no single leader would have complete control over any part of the business (ensuring that someone else would notice

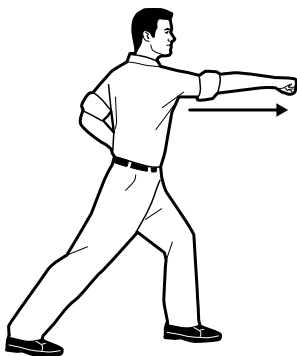
if executives tried to cut their way to prosperity) and no employee would have a single boss (making it safer to disagree). To instigate conversations about restoring the brand's reputation with both customers and employees, Conant asked executives to draft plans that went beyond their own departments.

The atmosphere at the company became rife with tension. Investors got nervous in the short term, and the stock price fell 30%. Conant replaced 300 of the top 350 leaders, mostly people who weren't able or willing to play by the new rules. But even after ejecting those who weren't complying, he found himself fighting within his own team about the pace of change; some of his top executives argued that he wasn't moving quickly enough. But the Campbell family, who still owned a significant amount of stock, stuck with Conant. They, too, wanted to rebuild the brand rather than continue to slash and burn.

Slowly the investment began to pay off. Product quality improved, pricing came back in line with quality, and the company restocked the innovation pipeline. Campbell introduced new product lines in accord with the greater purpose – Select Harvest Light Soups, for example, and whole-grain Pepperidge Farm breads. Consumers began to associate the brand with better nutritional benefits, as well as quality and convenience. And financial performance increased six years in a row. In October 2009, Campbell was named to the Dow Jones Sustainability Indexes in recognition of the company's top performance. It is also now in the top quartile of *Fortune* 500 companies when it comes to employee morale. Conant's fight was noble but not altruistic.

What's the Right Way to Fight?

Choosing the right fight is only half the battle. At least as important is how you conduct the fight. Three principles will help guide you:



A good fight isn't just about money or profits. It connects people with a sense of purpose that goes beyond their own self-interest.

Make it a sport, not a war. Even though business fights are tough and can get ugly, good leaders establish themselves as referees who see that things don't get out of hand. Fights must have rules, and those rules shouldn't change. Opposing sides should be reasonably matched. And the leader must define the parameters so everyone involved understands how to participate and what it takes to win.

For a classic example of a sporting fight, look at the process that Jack Welch, the former head of GE, conducted in identifying his successor. Each of the three finalists for the job – Robert Nardelli, James McNerney, and Jeffrey Immelt – was impressive in his own right, making it a truly difficult choice. So Welch launched a competition among the three in which each would lead a major cross-company initiative, while at the same time running one of GE's businesses and training his own replacement. Welch declared that there would be no dirty politics. Inevitably, tensions rose from the executive suite on down, but it was an open and clean fight, playing out over six months, complete with new alliances, speculation, and angling for position.

Was it a fair fight? It might not have felt that way to the three men, who had different strengths and weaknesses. And only one – Immelt – would come out on top (though the other two quickly got other offers). Was it a good use of company resources? Definitely. GE needed the best possible successor to Welch – and the company got terrific work out of the three as they competed for the job. Was there a better way to do it? We'd argue that GE's approach was more efficient and a better predictor of success than the traditional exhaustive rounds of interviews. Welch consciously raised tensions, but he created rules of the game to mitigate the consequences of those tensions. It was a high-stakes decision, worth a good fight.

Set up a formal structure, but work informally. Most employees can describe their company's formal organization – who reports to whom. But often it's the informal processes – involving hallway conversations, personal favors, and relationships that cross official boundaries – that accomplish goals the formal structure cannot.

Successful leaders structure fights through the formal organization, yet allow people to take advantage of personal and professional connections that don't necessarily make the org chart. One example of using informal structures to fight a good fight comes from Patrick Cescau's first move in 2005 as group CEO of Anglo-Dutch consumer packaged goods company Unilever. Until then Unilever had

HOW WELL DO YOU FIGHT?

An Eye-Opening Team Exercise

ONE OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE TOOLS we use to diagnose weaknesses in an executive team's "fighting" skills is the following exercise: We observe the team in action as members debate important agenda items or strategies, taking detailed notes about who said what, when it was said, how long a particular conversation took, what the group's reaction was, and so on.

When we feel we have a good sense of the group dynamic, we stop the meeting and have a conversation among ourselves but in front of the group. We assess how they are doing in relatively explicit terms. We discuss what the established norms of the group are and whether people are adhering to them. We examine the role of the leader. We note evidence we've seen of informal influence techniques and of efforts to go out on a limb and try new things. We mention the contributions, strengths, and weaknesses of individual team members, including the leader. We keep our comments as objective and factual as possible, quoting team members directly and reporting specific reactions from the group – "Did you see Helena roll her eyes when Hans made the point about the finance numbers being unrealistic?"

The feedback we get is amazing in its consistency across business groups and cultures. We almost always do the exercise as a surprise, so usually there is shocked silence. But soon the silence gives way to relief, laughter, and good-natured agreement. By objectively calling out problem areas we can give people permission to try new behaviors with their peers. Invariably, after one of these sessions, quiet people will speak up, someone new takes a pen to a flip chart, individuals catch themselves in behavioral quirks, and everyone has a good laugh. But the meeting almost always becomes more productive.

We knew we had struck upon a winning formula when the only complaint we got about the exercise was that we had left some people out of our feedback. We now keep a running list and make sure we mention every person. It's a simple enough technique to apply with your own group, but it often helps to invite a couple of trusted outsiders to offer a brutally honest but well-intentioned critique of group behaviors.

In every fight there are losers. Good leaders find a way to turn disappointing news into an occasion for personal development.



operated as two holding companies – a food business and a home and personal care products business, with two chairmen and two brand organizations worldwide. Each company managed its own P&L and did most of its brand development within local markets. This system was highly inefficient, since it meant, for example, that there were more

than 50 varieties of Unilever vanilla ice cream in Western Europe alone.

Cescau's initial fight was in tilting the organizational matrix in favor of global brands and categories. The goal: bigger, bolder innovations from the center, with local markets focused on brand building and delivery. The new operating framework was controversial and created huge tensions throughout the 170,000-plus-person organization. To set the stage, Cescau asked several emerging leaders to work out the details of the formal shift in roles but to maintain strong relationships with other executives who would inevitably take a different point of view on country and brand priorities. In effect, he was setting up informal fights in the trenches.

Take Vindi Banga. He had run Hindustan Lever, a joint venture between Indian shareholders and Unilever shareholders, and then the global home and personal care category before taking over the global foods category. Conventional wisdom said that although there were underlying global trends in demand for laundry detergents, soap, and deodorants, food was essentially a local business. Upending conventional wisdom always presents a fight, but Banga used his deep personal network to advance the cause. For instance, at one point it became apparent during a global foods team meeting that the marketing budget needed to be cut by €20 million. It was a relatively small reduction in the scheme of things, but the individual category leaders were reluctant to raise their hands to lower their expense allocations. Banga announced to the group that he would think about it over dinner and present his cuts to the team the next morning, knowing full well that the category and brand leaders would resolve the issue among themselves over drinks that evening rather than have the decision made for them. The informal structure worked perfectly.

PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT

To determine how well a battle is being fought, ask yourself the following questions:

RULEBOOK

- >> Are there clear boundaries for conduct and behavior?
- >> Are people with dissenting points of view encouraged to speak up?
- >> Are mechanisms in place to keep the debate on a professional level?

REFEREES

- >> Is the leader neutral or genuinely open to differing points of view?
- >> Does the leader keep the debate on track and enforce the rules?
- >> Does the leader create the sense that competition is fact based and fair?

PLAYING FIELD

- >> Does each side of the debate have a realistic chance to win?
- >> Is it clear how a resolution will be reached – by a decision from the top, a majority vote, or consensus?

GAPS TO EXPLOIT

- >> Do different groups have different agendas based on their roles?
- >> Does each group have a specific objective to champion?

RELATIONSHIPS

- >> Is there trust that individuals will deliver on their commitments and behave with integrity?
- >> Will leaders throughout the organization test perspectives up and down the hierarchy?

ENERGY LEVELS

- >> Are tension levels high enough to promote optimal performance?
- >> Do leaders have a good sense of what people care about, and are those passions used to motivate performance?
- >> Do leaders routinely take the temperature, and if necessary, adjust goals and assignments to rebalance tensions?

OUTCOMES

- >> Can the leader give people bad news without damaging personal relationships?
- >> Is there dignity in losing, and is risk taking rewarded?


Turn pain into gain. In every fight there are winners and there are losers. Not all ideas are good ideas, and not all strategies work. Communicating the outcome to the losers can be hard – and can damage relationships. Good leaders find a way to turn disappointing news into an occasion for personal development.

Arguably the best way to turn pain into gain is to give people manageable challenges that stretch their skills – and open up opportunities in the future. Looking back to Jack Welch’s horse race, we can imagine that neither Nardelli nor McNerney was very happy when Immelt got the job, though both men reacted well publicly. But Welch had been up front from the start about the race, and he kept a promise he had made, which was to see that the runners-up would make successful transitions to the chief executive’s office somewhere else. After their six-month trial by fire at GE, Nardelli and McNerney were tapped almost immediately for the top jobs at Home Depot and 3M. (Both have since moved on.)

Of course, leaders usually don’t have the option of sending losers off to another top job. They do, however, have other ways to soften the blow. They can, for instance, find ways to help people adjust to a strategy they don’t agree with or use connections to help displaced employees find new positions that better match their skills and preferences. When people deliver results and fight the right fights to the best of their abilities, they should gain some-

thing real and valuable, even when they end up on the losing side. To get people to step up and take risks, you have to reward risk taking itself, not just successful outcomes.

...

Harmony has tremendous appeal. But good leaders ask hard questions about how an organization could be doing a better job, and great leaders consistently fight for what they believe in. Fighting the right fight is a discipline, not an event. When one fight ends, the best leaders will be looking for the next fight. That’s not to say the workplace should be an environment of constant turmoil; great leaders also know when to give people a rest. But they continually seek ways to push people to the point where they find their energy sweet spot, without subjecting them to unbearable tension. 

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“I’d like to hire you, but I’m away an awful lot.”

Scott Arthur Masear