

Why Leaders Fail...

Even the Sincere Ones

By Bonnie Gorbaty

There are many reasons why leaders fail, many of which are out of the leader's control. Other reasons they fail have to do with the leader herself. These are the "sincere failures," those who, despite their best, somehow, in the end, still didn't get it right.

The reason for sincere failure differs at each stage of a career. When starting out, the principle reason for the sincere failure is that of not creating followers. They have heard about the difference between managing and leading, for instance, but they don't really get it. They never realize that their vaunting expertise isn't what people are looking for— their people, after all, have expertise of their own, thank you! What their people really want from their leader is attention: They want their work to accomplish something and they want to be recognized for accomplishing it. They'll stay and grow and contribute to an organization when they are valued, and the leader is the prime giver of that value.

The next level of sincere failure we call the "charismatic" leader, the one who makes everyone feel like they matter BUT... only if they matter to her. This is the leader with a vision who is out to accomplish something big – but it's only about her! A leader's vision can have many sources, but to lead to lasting success, a vision has to come from

the leader's values, the utterly implacable devotion of a leader to have something in the world be better for others.

A sincere failure at this level is one that mistakes ego for values. When a leader is making her values come to fruition, she will share it with everyone, and anyone to make it happen, and is not concerned about taking credit, or getting rich. In fact, the leader working out of a set of values would do the work for free – and many do, if they can afford to. The leader who is in it for ego, wants it her way or no way, wants something out of it, and always sees the process as a zero sum game: If I don't get it, someone else will, so I am going to get it. This level of failure accounts for the Worldcom, Enron and Tyco scandals of recent years.

Finally, the few leaders who have left an imprint of themselves and their values on companies and on their slices of the world can experience the sincere failure of debilitating doubt. These seasoned, experienced leaders cannot see their own value, nor what they as individuals bring into the world. Instead they too closely attribute their success to their managerial talent, their deft leader's touch, or to good luck or to some other external factor. They become debilitated because what is being asked of them is to give more of themselves to larger and even more



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significant issues, but they don't feel qualified, able or as though they have the energy. It's the golf course for these folks.

Sincere failures are the result of not taking on the task of personally growing into larger worlds and larger challenges. While they are deeply personal, we all suffer— especially the last two. Leading is a special privilege and responsibility offered to just a few. Those who step into this role also need to step out of their small lives into larger worlds of values and vision. They need to give to others from the vast well of their lives. They need to dare to lead greatly.