

[Kamran Rizvi](http://www.navitus.biz/navitus-magicians/management-team/kamran-rizvi), Navitus
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Weak managers would much rather delegate upwards or sideways, than to deal with crucial matters personally. When confronted by their bosses, such managers tend to seek refuge in excuses.

There are times when straight talking by a leader becomes absolutely necessary. This could be when performance is not as expected; deadlines are not being met; or the blame-game is on. People need timely and no-nonsense feedback to help remove their blindness. Ability to confront sticky situations head-on, when no one else in the team is willing to own their personal responsibility, is vital in a leader. ♦However, without a sense of proper timing and approach, direct confrontation by a manager with a colleague can become a liability.

Ability to talk straight is invaluable in leaders and managers, though it is not so easy to deploy. I find an uncomfortably large number of managers who prefer to sit on the fence, instead of being decisive. This could partly be due to a culture of deference to authority encouraged in some organizations, or it may be that the company is risk-averse.

Weak managers would much rather delegate upwards or sideways, than to deal with crucial matters personally. When confronted by their bosses, such managers tend to seek refuge in excuses. They readily offer reasons for why something could not be done. All this may sound familiar to you, but have you ever asked yourself, why you allow this to happen?

Your problems don't come because you don't know how to calculate entropies or to design plates. They come because you don't know about people. Our best comes out when we have honest discussions. Our worst comes out when we behave like robots or ♦professionals♦. You all have the delusion that it's your business to sell hardware. But every company of the future is going to be in the business of exquisite care - which means quick turnaround time and convenience. To deliver exquisite care, you need an organization that coordinates well and listens well

Says Fernando Flores

[1] Flores was

Chile's minister of finance -- and, later, a political prisoner. Now he teaches companies how to use assessments and commitments to transform the way they do business.

In a conversation with a general manager of a large local distribution company in Pakistan, the issue of poor implementation came up. He said, "Kamran, I am faced with a problem. My managers don't follow-up on their commitments. I send them reminders; they receive circulars on changes in our pricing and promotional policies periodically, yet it all seems to fall on deaf ears. What should I do? What do you think is the problem here?" I thought for a moment, and said, "I am afraid the problem is not with the people you are describing." Then where does the problem lie?" He anxiously asked, and I remember telling him directly, "With respect, I think, you are the problem!" My blunt remark caused him to momentarily go red in the face. After a few seconds of silence, calm returned and he realized that he was not holding his people accountable.

Holding people to account is tough, particularly, if you are in the habit of pleasing them. Managers seeking popularity to keep their jobs can end up being very costly for any business. Dilly dallying over matters of significance serves no one. When an individual's performance is below par, timely and effective feedback becomes essential. Good managers do it effectively. They give constructive feedback when it's needed and in private.

By their very nature performance appraisals suffer from a degree of subjectivity. The problem is compounded when appraisers fail to highlight poor performance while conducting appraisal interviews. Lack of assertion by managers could be due to a multitude of factors, ranging from a lack of competence; fear of rocking the boat; excessive desire to please; or even lack of time. Weak managers feel threatened by confident and competent subordinates, who can make intelligent arguments to justify their case.

In an article that appeared in Fast Company magazine in 1998 titled The Power of Words by Harriet Rubin. It is about Fernando Flores and his work. Given below are a few extracts from the article that appeared in Fast Company magazine. You will find these illuminating:

◆◆

◆Fernando Flores is pissed off. He has had enough of the bullshit. The 55-year-old philosopher has flown halfway around the world, from California to Holland, to transform two executive teams -- 32 leaders in all -- of a global construction giant. These are people accustomed to building on a grand scale. But right now, building is their problem, not their business: Their world-class reputation for being brilliantly managed, it turns out, consists only of hollow words -- words that have little power and less

value.◆<p style="margin: 0in 0in 0.0001pt;">◆</p> <p style="margin: 0in 0in 0.0001pt;">◆Flores knows about words and how they translate directly into deeds. He knows that talk is never cheap -- he often charges more than \$1 million for his services, a fee that is linked directly to specific promises of increased revenues and savings. He also knows that talk is the source of these executives' failure. Their words work against them -- which is why they can't get anything to work for them.◆</p>

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Flores is preaching, flies right in the face of our South Asian culture. We are well known for our politeness and courtesy. It's a trait we can all be proud of; however, it does not sit well with the need for an honest and open dialogue, which is crucial in any business.

Over the years, we have learned to show respect to our elders or seniors by simply agreeing with whatever they have to say. Boardroom meetings are often seen as places where the chairman, usually overpowering, steers the deliberations. Several heads nod ritualistically in silent agreement as the chair speaks. Ironically, the very people, who choose to stay quiet during the meeting, get busy in back-room chatter about the very issues they should have addressed.

Insecurity often leads to such hypocritical behavior. Anyone found questioning authority is often seen as a rebel and is singled-out as a spoiler in most organizations. Late Agha Hasan Abedi was a victim of such a culture of superficiality. Most of his immediate colleagues were never known to have questioned his decisions directly to his face.

Unfortunately, even though Mr Abedi is known to have admired candor, he never quite found this trait amongst his senior colleagues.

Men with the audacity of Flores can make a huge difference in our organizations. They need to be found and encouraged.

Compassion of the strong expresses itself in honesty that is combined with respect while giving feedback on behavior or performance. To lose sight of respect while being brutally honest can turn out to be very expensive!

From an article by Harriet Rubin published in Fast Company Magazine, Dec 1998, titled, **The Power of Words**.

mce_style="font-size: small;" style="font-size: small; ">-----</p> <p> </p><p></p><div class="mceltemVisualAid" style="position: absolute; left: -10000px; top: 0px; width: 1px; height: 1px; overflow: hidden;" id="_mcePaste"> Normal 0 false false false EN-US X-NONE X-NONE MicrosoftInternetExplorer4



src="http://www.navitus.biz/plugins/editors/tinymce/jscripts/tiny_mce/plugins/media/img/trans.gif" mce_src="plugins/editors/tinymce/jscripts/tiny_mce/plugins/media/img/trans.gif" height="100" width="100" /> <i style="mso-bidi-font-style:normal" mce_style="mso-bidi-font-style:normal">No matter how big your organization gets, continue to empower your people at every level to deliver. Only this way will size lead to advantage.</i><i style="mso-bidi-font-style:normal" mce_style="mso-bidi-font-style:normal">◆</i>◆ <p class="MsoNormal" style="mso-pagination:widow-orphan" mce_style="mso-pagination:widow-orphan">It is always useful to explore the history of any company to understand how they got to being what they are today. Corporate success usually follows some combination of visionary entrepreneurship and luck. When companies acquire early successes and achieve a dominant position in some market or markets they become profitable and usually follow a steep growth trajectory in their early years. </p> <p class="MsoNormal" style="mso-pagination:widow-orphan" mce_style="mso-pagination:widow-orphan">◆</p> <p class="MsoNormal" style="mso-pagination:widow-orphan" mce_style="mso-pagination:widow-orphan">With the passage of time, however, pressures on managers come mostly from inside the firm. Building and staffing a bureaucracy that can cope with growth is the biggest challenge. External constituencies are neglected. The firm needs, hires, and promotes managers, not leaders, to cope with the growing bureaucracy. Top managers allow these

people, not leaders, to become executives. Sometimes top management actively prevents leaders from becoming senior executives. Managers begin to believe that they are the best and that idiosyncratic traditions are superior. They tend to become increasingly arrogant and aloof. The problem is compounded when top management does nothing to stop this trend and often ends up exacerbating it.

A strong, insular and conceited culture develops. Managers fail to acknowledge the value of customers and other key stakeholders. They behave in an inward-looking, sometimes political fashion and fail to acknowledge the value of leadership and the talent available at all levels that can provide it. They tend to stifle initiative and innovation. They behave in centralized and authoritative ways.

Consequently, as organizations grow, whether in terms of sales, number of employees, range of products and services, market share, or whatever, they start to lose the advantage they once had. According to John Naisbitt in the book *Rethinking the Future* it is the small companies who are creating the global economy, not the Fortune 500. And these days a small company can be as small as one person. In his book, *Megatrends 2000* he gave the example of his neighbors Linde and Lito who have a publishing company called Western Eye Press. He continues, *It's just two people and they publish wonderful photographic and guide books. They create them on Macintosh computers in their basement in Telluride. They printout the camera-ready pages on their own high resolution laser printer. Then they FedExed these pages to Seoul, South Korea, and the printer there manufactures their books and ships them to distributors all over the world. Western Eye Press is a key player in the global economy and its just two people on this little mountain perch in Colorado.*

Large corporations and global conglomerates, if not careful, end up becoming highly bureaucratic, over-managed, rule-driven and inflexible by virtue of their size. In this day and age of cyberspace and nanotechnology, fetish with size of a business can become an impediment. This is particularly true for organizations that have grown significantly in scale in terms of revenues and market share. Organizations like Citibank have lost touch with their core constituents. It may be a major player with a strong brand image, but customers interacting with its frontline employees are often disappointed by their state of helplessness in resolving routine problems. This could be on account of slavish adherence to archaic procedures. Often, individual contributors in big companies don't take the initiative needed to listen and understand customer requirements with the intent to ultimately delighting them. There is a lot to be said for systems and processes,

but if they are not customer oriented and responsive, the game is as good as lost. ♦

Quality can now be replicated anywhere in the world. China is leading the way in this respect. With the falling of trade barriers and dropping of quotas, the Chinese have taken their global market share in textiles from 16% to over 50% in less than a decade. In recent years, the Pakistan market has been flooded with Chinese products (mostly electronic, light engineering) that are low priced and in much demand.

We no longer live in a world of big mainframes. We live in a world where the real power is large networks ♦ a lot of individuals connected together ♦ Facebook & Twitter are pointing the way. A network does not have any headquarters. Chinese excel in this field and have spread their global business through this means. Naisbitt cites Asea Brown Boveri (ABB) as a great example of a huge company that thrives and grows through networking. He quotes Percy Barnevik (Former CEO at ABB) as having said, ♦ We grow all the time, but we also shrink all the time. ♦ As the network gets larger, the nodes get smaller.

So, no matter how big your company gets, continue to excel by empowering your people at every level to deliver. Building agility and responsiveness is the key.