



turning managers into leaders

Merge's Monthly Mega Minute – November 2005

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Merge Gupta-Sunderji helps turn managers into leaders. Through engaging keynotes and facilitated workshops, she gives people specific and practical tools to achieve leadership and communication success. Contact her at www.mergespeaks.com or 403-605-4756

The trombonist who played out of tune

The symphony orchestra was magnificent. Strings, woodwinds, brass and percussion: eighty talented musicians making exquisite harmony together. The audience sat on the edge of its seats, enthralled, while the conductor wove the threads of each instrument into a single tapestry of breathtaking sound. The effect was magical, the audience enchanted. That was, until one trombonist began to play out of tune. The effect was almost instantaneous. Immediately, the audience noticed the discord, and it wasn't long before the murmurs of discontent began. Within minutes, the single out-of-tune brass was all the listeners could focus on. Seventy-nine exceptional musicians no longer had the ability to hold their audience's attention. The single source of discord had captured all the attention. The single source of discord had obscured the talent and success of the other seventy-nine.

The effect of negativity in a team is much the same. All it takes is one negative person, one source of discord, to sour an entire work group. The vast majority of your team may be exceptional, but if you have even one source of negativity, the toxicity can spread rapidly through the group. Left unchecked, it will rapidly obscure the talent and the potential of the rest of the employees. Which is why, as a leader, it is imperative that you move quickly and decisively to deal with the source of negativity. If you wait for it to go away, it will only fester and grow. Treat it as a performance problem: specifically identify the negative behaviours, clearly outline the alternative positive behaviours you expect instead, and hold your employee accountable to positive change. Don't let one out-of-tune trombonist eclipse the talent and potential of the rest of your orchestra.