

Eckmann Learning Journal
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Bizarro Leadership Sometimes the Dragon Wins!

There is an old maxim: "Remember, no matter how hard you work, no matter how right you are - sometimes the dragon wins."

We all have tried to do something and had it not turn out the way we wanted it to. It hurts when we lose. We want to believe in a world of justice, truth, and beauty and we more than likely hold a belief that good "should" triumph over evil.

Many of us live by a set of principles and we have learned, as my Dad used to say to me, "Be sure to leave every place better for you having been there." Many of us grew up with a desire to be people who want to make the world a better place. We believe in doing the right thing and we believe if we do the right thing, "good" things should happen to us and those around us.

Think about it, if you live your life with the basic assumption that one person can make a difference, and you try to be that "one" person, it is heartbreaking when you try and "lose."

Leadership is about trying to make a positive difference. This month's journal is about the "Bizarro" side of leadership; losing. The term Bizarro was made famous in DC Comic Books and Bizarro was the term used to describe any and all of Superman's villains (The Joker or Lex Luthor). Bizarro stood for the opposite side of good Superman. Losing is often the opposite of leadership.

Let's talk about four different ways we can find ourselves "losing"

1. You can lose big time – lose all of your money, lose your health, lose your family and end up a bum on the street (like my mom always said I'd end up).
2. You can lose for awhile – lose some of your money, lose a lot of your pride, have a fight with the family.
3. You can lose and have it end up being a "win." As an example, I got fired from a job that I loved. In about six months I ended up working at a place that I loved more and in fact that job became the foundation for the work I'm doing now. If I had stayed at the old job, I doubt that I would have ever gotten my doctorate. I would have been too content.
4. You can lose and have it end up being a "loss." You can actually have some things that happen that you, frankly, that you never quite recover from. Once, I had a woman promoted over me that stole my work, took all the credit and was one of the biggest liars I've ever known. She is still thriving in the old environment. This bites when I think about it.

What are our choices when we are on the losing side of leadership? It may depend upon how tough the loss was and at what point in time we are looking at the loss. For instance, if you are in the middle of #1 above and living on the streets it is pretty darn hard to “look on the bright side.”

However, in general terms, let’s explore our options in a loss:

1. **We can pout.** (This option makes us look unattractive).
2. **We can defend our self.** (The dragon may still win but you might feel better if you “vent your spleen”).
3. **We can “suck it up.”** This is OK – but often you will end up with resentment.
4. **We can try to look at the bigger picture and see what our part of the loss was and what part honestly belonged to others.**
5. **We can quit.** We can take our marbles and go find another place and new people to play with.
6. **We can cry.** Some losses deserve sincere mourning.
7. **We can look for patterns of failure in our lives.** As an example, if we continue to find ourselves in relationships with the other gender that are failures, we might want to look at the “type” of person we are choosing to deal with and see if we might want to try a different type next time.
8. **We can gain a new appreciation for how hard it is to exercise successful leadership.** After working for several decades I’ve seen the dragon win a lot.
9. **We can gain more compassion for others when they lose.** When our son was a drug and alcohol addict I promised myself that when any other family was going through this I would be kind and listen and I would be sure to not “act self-righteous.”
10. **We can learn.** As I look back over my career I am sure that I have learned more when the dragon won than when I did.

I know we would all like to live a “Strawberry Shortcake” life where the good guy always wins and at the end of the day the bad guy is on the bottom and the good guy is on top. I know we would all love to have win after win in our leadership efforts. However, that isn’t how it always works – sometimes the dragon wins – sometimes we are living in a Bizarro world - and we lose – but we can learn!

Respectfully,

Helen