

## *Chapter Twenty-nine*

# OBSCENE LEADERSHIP

There are some words so vile that you can only refer to them by their first letter; so inflammatory and degrading, you do not want to even go there. So why do those in positions of leadership insist on incorporating and even promoting these into their organizations?

### THE “N” WORD: NEPOTISM

Nepotism is favoritism granted to relatives regardless of merit. I once worked for a family-founded tech company: the father was the CEO, the mother was the VP, and the children were the directors. While this is the owner’s prerogative, it made it difficult for anyone without a certain last name to see any future. I also witnessed nepotism first-hand when I was assigned to an Air National Guard unit, as well as while working as a government contractor. I was told there were four or

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five main families that had worked there for generations, so be careful what you did and said. They weren't kidding. Reminds me of an old joke:

"Rob," the boss said, "you've been with the company for a year. You started off in the post room, one week later you were promoted to a sales position, and one month after that you were promoted to district manager of the sales department. Just four short months later, you were promoted to vice-chairman. Now it's time for me to retire, and I want you to take over the company. What do you say to that?"

"Thanks," said the employee.

"Thanks?" the boss replied. "Is that all you can say?"

"I suppose not," the employee said. "Thanks, *Dad*."

When I returned to carry on my father's legacy business, I waited for three months after his homegoing before taking the helm. I spent 28 years in completely unrelated and unconnected fields so I could develop my strengths and earn my *own* stripes. When I returned, people actually told me they had no idea that my father and I were related. Mission accomplished. Don't build your town on nepotism, it's an unstable foundation.

### THE "F" WORD: FRATERNIZATION

I know this word well from my time in the military. You associated socially only with those close to your rank. To do otherwise could result in disciplinary action. While team building is great, you've got to know where to draw the line. Fraternization leads to another disgusting "F" word: **favoritism**. And this is the kiss of death in any organization because it undermines the

leader's perceived or demonstrated ability to be fair or impartial. As my father used to say, "whatever can be misunderstood will be misunderstood."

I was recently at a book discussion with a Philadelphia-area credit union where the CEO shared that he cannot be a friend to his employees and that the job of leadership is a lonely one because you have to closely guard your boundaries at all times. George MacDonald said it best: "To be trusted is a greater compliment than to be loved." In his classic speech *The Price of Leadership*, Charlie "Tremendous" Jones says that the first price a leader must pay is loneliness.

### THE "C" WORD: CRONYISM

Cronyism is the act of showing partiality to one's close friends, typically by appointing them to a position in a company or organization despite them not necessarily being the best people for the position. This is best summarized by the old adage, "it's not *what* you know but *who* you know." While networking is a critical skill in business, it's important to remain completely impartial to your friends when selecting individuals for a position.

Not doing so can get you in all sorts of legal and HR trouble and can manifest itself by creating a dysfunctional and inbred organization of groupthink stink. Abraham Lincoln said, "If friendship is your weakest point then you are the strongest person in the world". Let's face it, the fewer friends you have when making leadership decisions the more self-sufficient you are because you can maintain your objectivity. President Lincoln showed us that if you want to lead, you've got to master your enemies, not surround yourself with friends.

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Leaders have to be hyper-vigilant for any signs or perceptions of these obscene trends. They cannot condone them in their organizations, and they cannot engage in anything even remotely related to these vulgar activities.