

Courage is required! If you're scared, you're right on track.

You want to bring about change without ever feeling the pain, without ever having to feel vulnerable. It just doesn't work that way. Peter Block, *The Empowered Manager*

I speak regularly with clients about the need for them, as leaders, to have courage. “To do what?” they ask, and I remind them, “to tell the truth about how things work and especially how they don’t work and to talk about your own level of frustration.” This isn’t easy to do. They were hired because they have the knowledge, skills and talent needed by their company. At the time they were hired their employer recognized their strengths and had some expectation that they would use their skills autonomously to serve the company.

Take Gilles, for example. He is a powerful and compassionate leader. In the following situation he offers a great example of how he told the truth. This was not easy to do.

In the past three months our company has had to tighten its belt considerably, and this after a year of exceptional fruition. The belt-tightening was filtering down week after week, first in the area of recognition, then infrastructure (amount of space allocated, types of furniture), and finally compensation. Throughout, the leadership team of my group felt that it was in damage-control mode, trying to keep things under control, hoping and waiting for things to improve. As a leadership team we tried to reconcile what was happening with our values so that we could present this information to the entire team with integrity. I tried to manage expectations but, as you might expect, expectations were extremely high and the leadership was feeling more and more disempowered. I was trying to understand what all these changes meant to me. I knew I had to focus the team on the future and move us out of the “glass half-empty” mentality.

“Serving up,” or aligning events and gathering data to ensure that the boss looks good, requires a great deal of energy. The boss is human and prone to error. Nevertheless, many organizations do practice serving the boss in preference to serving the employees. When you realize that this is happening, there is a risk and a major cost to consider.

To change a situation you must also change how you think about the situation. There are no exceptions.