7 DEADLY SINS
OF LEADERSHIP

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...a word from our Founder and CEO, Todd Ross

I define leadership as ‘getting things done through the willing cooperation of others’. Anyone that has attended my leadership training courses knows the importance I place on this. Unfortunately, in corporate America today, true leadership is rarely seen and trained even less. You can see this 3D, real time by looking at the mess we have in Washington today that can be contributed to lack of leadership.

Peter Drucker, appropriately nick named the FATHER OF MODERN LEADERSHIP shares the same philosophy. Drucker believes leadership, effective leadership, can be achieved by things like treating your people as if they volunteer, modeling the military and having good ethics and morals.

He also believed that solid leadership is also knowing what NOT to do. The following are 7 sins that can totally wreck your leadership endeavors.

God bless and enjoy!
Drucker set very high ethical standards for all leaders. To Drucker, management as a profession practiced by leaders was a “calling” regardless of the environment in which it was practiced. So he saw leaders as being special people entrusted with special organizational, as well as societal responsibilities. Drucker knew that leaders are human and sometimes err, and he was well aware that there were leaders who did not live up to the high standards he felt not only were necessary, but were part of the code that they accepted when they made the decision to accept the mantel of the leader. Some leaders failed their profession, the organizations and individuals they led, and society. Some lost sight of the real goals expected of them and the reason they were in their positions of responsibility. Others didn’t understand the implications of the responsibilities they had accepted, and put their own interests above those they led. Others yet were seduced by the power and the privileges that leadership brings. All of these failings pained him, and he frequently wrote about them. Drucker hoped that by making these explicit he could help leaders avoid falling into these traps.

Model The Military.
Peter Drucker had great respect for how the military developed leadership, with an emphasis on character and leaders as positive role models. The military's emphasis on commitment and "taking care of your people" are examples of what Drucker admired about military leadership.
Categorizing Drucker’s Teachings

To categorize these potential failings, I sought a number of different frameworks, including abuse of special privileges, abuse of power and corruption. None seemed to fit all of the cautionary tales through which Drucker warned leaders of all stripes. One morning I awoke with words the “Seven Deadly Sins” on my mind. Clearly this was my subconscious at work while I was asleep. It seemed to fit perfectly.

The development of the “Seven Deadly Sins” is clouded in mystery. Some say they were based on an interpretation of Israel’s fight against the seven Canaanite tribes after fleeing Egypt. They and their interpretations have changed little as originally conceived.

Comparing The Seven Deadly Sins against my notes of where Drucker saw executives go awry, I was surprised to discover that these were the very vices that Drucker had cautioned leaders to avoid. They might have saved otherwise outstanding leaders and the organizations they led from disaster.
The Sin of Pride

The Sin of Pride is almost always considered the most serious of the Seven Deadly Sins. Yet it seems so innocuous. My wife calls it “being full of oneself.” I believe feeling proud of what a leader has accomplished or is accomplishing is perfectly acceptable. The problem comes when one feels this pride to the extent that the leader believes himself so special that ordinary rules no longer apply to him. That’s where many leaders go awry.

The Sin of Lust

I once heard a retired leader of a large organization of almost a million members speak about his challenges of leading this organization. “One of the biggest problems,” he said, “was newly promoted senior executives. I may be exaggerating a little,” he continued. “But it seemed almost that as soon as we promoted a man to be a senior executive, he suddenly decided that he was God’s gift to women.”

This individual spoke at a time when almost all senior executives had been male. However, I do not think that one would find much difference with female executives. There is unfortunately a feeling among some leaders that they have “arrived” and are “entitled” to additional sexual gratification as some sort of fringe leadership benefit. In one online survey done by the White Stone Journal, The Deadly Sin of Lust was the most frequent of the Seven Deadly Sins self-reported as “my biggest failing.” So this sin is hardly uncommon. However, it can have very unfortunate consequences. In any workplace it creates jealousies, feelings of favoritism, a lack of trust, damages people and relationships and more.
The Sin of Greed
The Sin of Greed is a sin of excess. It frequently starts with power. Leaders have power, and unfortunately having power has a tendency to lead to corruption if the leader isn’t careful. This may start with the acceptance of small favors and grow into vacations, loans and worse. How do these things happen? A leader sees others with more than he has. Questions may be raised in the leader’s mind as to why others have so much more, yet (in the leader’s mind) are far less deserving. Maybe a small bribe is accepted. It may not even be seen as a bribe, just a favor between friends. If the leader allows himself to be seduced in this way, greed can take over. Unlike the movie, greed is never “good,” even as a motivator, and though Drucker analyzed and approved many motivations, greed was not one.

Motivation: Treat employees like volunteers.
Peter greatly admired nonprofit organizations, and he extracted leadership lessons from them. If a leader treats employees as if they were volunteers - free to leave at any time - the leader pays greater attention to the non-monetary needs of workers, and moves from transactional motivation to transformational motivation.
The Sin of Sloth

The Sin of Sloth has to do with an unwillingness to act. Sometimes this is due to laziness. More often it is an unwillingness to take on work that the leader considers is beneath him. I have many times seen leaders watching critical work that must be completed and for which they were also qualified to do. Yet they stood around “supervising” when they could have given real help to their subordinates and to the mission that they were responsible for accomplishing. In too many cases, good men and women fail because their leader failed to help or take action in other ways. Make no mistake about it, The Sin of Sloth leads to disaster. Leaders must be proactive and they must take action.

“...leadership is defined by results, not attributes.”
- Peter F. Drucker
The Sin of Wrath

This sin has to do with uncontrolled anger. There is a time for anger in leadership when it serves a definite and useful purpose. As Kenneth Blanchard and Spencer Johnson taught us, you can take one minute to make a correction and include the words “I’m angry” and then tell the recipient why. Moreover, anger does have a useful function in that it can mobilize psychological and physical resources to do something about a problem.

However, leaders need to avoid repeated and uncontrolled anger because it can have negative impacts on their leadership. It can destroy morale, does not guarantee a lasting effect in correcting problems, and in effect requires surrendering anger as a tool for the times when expressing it is really useful and appropriate. Moreover when in an angry state, anger causes the leader a loss of self-monitoring capacity and the ability to observe objectively.

Drucker taught leaders to analyze their environment and to determine what actions that have already occurred mean for the future before taking action. Using anger as a single response to all leadership challenges prevents us from doing this analysis. It prevents the leader from making good decisions and may prevent the leader from taking the correct action appropriate to the situation. Actions taken during uncontrolled action are frequently in error and require additional work to undo the consequences of these mistakes later.
The Sin of Envy

With the Sin of Envy, the leader is envious of what is enjoyed by someone else. This may or may not be incorporated with greed. The sin usually leads the leader to make decisions and to take actions that will be to the disadvantage to the object of his envy. So a leader who falls victim to this sin may deny an earned promotion to a qualified subordinate, attempt to destroy another’s reputation or in other ways attempt to make himself feel better by lowering the situation of another. This is obviously harmful to this other individual, hurts the organization and is probably harmful to the leader who perpetrates these actions.
The Sin of Gluttony

Most think of food or drink with this sin, but for the leader it has a far more ominous connotation. The Sin of Gluttony was the one that most frustrated Drucker. Expensive food or drink is scarce. Therefore excessive consumption can be seen as a sign of status. But gluttony need not apply only to food.

Drucker knew how hard managers had to work to do their jobs as they needed to be done, and he had defended high salaries for top managers early in his career. However skyrocketing executive salaries caused him to drastically alter his opinion. Drucker said and wrote that executive salaries at the top had become clearly excessive and that the ratios of the compensation of American top managers to the lowest paid workers were the highest in the world. Moreover, this difference wasn’t slight, but differed by magnitudes. He said this was morally wrong. The ratio of average CEO compensation in the United States to average pay of a non-management employee in the United States hit a high in 2001 of 525 to 1. Drucker recommended a ratio of no more than 20 to 1.

The Sin of Gluttony was to be avoided for good leadership. Interestingly, Drucker drew a parallel of high executive salaries with the demands of unions for more and more benefits without an increase in productivity. He said we would pay a terrible price for these examples of gluttony and that “it is never pleasant to watch hogs gorge.” As I write these words, we are paying this price.

There are things that a leader must do, and things he must not. The Seven Deadly Sins are those that Drucker maintained that leaders must not do.