



When business becomes

a battlefield

Graham Yemm and Bruce Hoverd look at the detrimental effects of treating business like battle and how this can be changed to create a positive environment for everyone.

"We have to be careful. It's like a minefield out there."

"I like to lob the odd grenade into the meeting to shake things up."

"You have to watch your back all the time with her."

"We need to attack whilst they are in a weak position."

"There was blood all over the carpet after he had finished with them."

What is your reaction when you are in situations where you hear these kinds of messages? What sort of tone and atmosphere do you think they create?

These words and phrases are becoming more commonplace language amongst managers and are indicators of how things are done in their business. They are also indicative of the growing number of leaders who believe that running a business is like waging war or engaging in a military operation.

Using analogy, metaphor and strong language are all helpful in getting a message across. However, they become unhelpful when they aggressively drive the ways in which communications and interactions are carried out.

Firstly, it encourages people to adopt a consistently aggressive stance and set of behaviours. In a war, one side supposedly wins and the other loses. Yet, as we know, history has often proved this to be a fallacy. In business a win/lose approach generally creates fear, anger, frustration and often the desire for payback. Do you want

these feelings to be rife amongst your managers, staff, suppliers and customers? A leader who adopts this way of thinking is also giving permission for his people to attack others, ignore them, abuse, bully, manipulate and put others down. When this becomes a pattern, the outcome is usually characterised by a growing culture of hostility, inappropriate competition, resentment, lack of trust, over critical feedback, excessive control and poor decision-making. This is exactly what happens when a military group becomes riddled with abuse.

Secondly, at a personal level, individuals are encouraged to view others as the enemy. Too often this becomes people from other areas of the business rather than uniting and focusing energies on a goal, or what competitors are doing. How often do you hear, "It's those idiots in HR who are slowing us down!" or "IT are a law unto themselves.?"

The archetypal warmonger

Let's imagine a day in the life of 'W', our archetypal warmonger, so we really understand why this situation is a disaster. Leaving the 'home' battlefield in the harassed hands of a suffering lieutenant, 'W' is drawn into conflict with every other commuter who is perceived as delivering 'hostile fire' ... red-faced and pumping adrenaline. Arriving at work, 'W' is fired up to give the team a roasting for this week's performance. Having despatched these shamefaced privates to the front line, 'W' can now beat off the demands and advances of several colleagues and seek out malevolent customers whose payments are a day overdue.

Now on a roll, 'W' stalks or pursues departments who have not supplied the figures or information 'needed yesterday'. 'W' even has time to offer the bosses advice on the right tactics for the way forward. It's been a good day for 'W' as he steels himself for the next campaign, unaware of the trail of destruction in his wake...

Do you want to be another 'W'? What is it like having to work with or for him? What can you do to create a different scenario?

Start with your own thinking and mindset. You will only create a constructive environment for yourself and others if you believe that life and work can be joyous, fun, stimulating and challenging – and you want to be part of it. Consider, before you attend your next meeting, are you thinking: "This is going to be difficult, a fight for survival, where I can't afford to give anything away and I must battle for everything"? Or a much more helpful alternative: "This will stretch me and I can rise to the challenge by convincing others that what I bring is useful and we can all get some of what we want."

Your attitude needs to be supported in your overall approach. If you adopt an optimistic, constructive, interested, caring and honest approach, it becomes positively contagious for others. Most people respond to leaders who are forward looking, straight talking, focused on positive outcomes and willing to include others in their vision and decisions. Added to this, is the ability to use a range of helpful strategies, dependent on the situation and the people involved. Ask yourself at any point, how do you need to approach these people to get their

commitment to the vision, make the most of their thinking, and deal with the problems we need to resolve?

Finally, it will be your day-to-day behaviour towards others and their perception of your impact that will confirm their response and position. By developing a complete toolkit of complementary behaviours, which you can use consciously and in the right place, you will increase your positive impact and success rate.

'Say thank you and take a personal interest in those working closely with you'

The 'right' approach

Based on our research and experience, we strongly recommend you use combinations of the following styles, as appropriate:

- Be clear, concise and structured when you want to persuade others to your point of view. Ask yourself how will this idea make sense to them and what benefits will be important?
- When things are going well let others know and celebrate success. Conversely people prefer to know what is not working. So be explicit and precise about what needs to be different.
- State directly and precisely what you need others to do and what your expectations are. Most people like to know where they stand.
- Really listen to what others think, so you can learn from them and tap into their creative abilities. Continually explore for the best idea and solution. Remember, your idea is not always right.
- Establish as much common ground as you can early in the relationship so that you are working from a strongly shared base and can resolve issues more easily when things get tough.
- Be open about what is going on for you and in the situation. Seeking help when you need something will make it easy for others to know how to best support you.

- Articulate your vision and strategy only when you know it contains something that will really hook and attract others.
- The easiest way of all to create a positive environment for yourself and others is to say thank you and take a personal interest in those working closely with you.

If you openly use these behaviours you will build a healthy rapport with others based on trust, collaboration, involvement and best practice. Your role will shift from warmonger to that of peacemaker.



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