

## CHAPTER 2

### Who needs a boss?

I'm sure we could sit here all day and navel-gaze or psychoanalyse ourselves, to try to discover why we need leaders, but I think that would be a waste of time. We know we do. Even the most anti-management employee, upon detailed questioning, would break down and admit that they need a boss to make sure things happen.

Why do you suppose there never has been a successful example of a company, society or country operating without leaders?

(This is not to say that we haven't tried.)

Communism was an interesting experiment in the absurd. The grand idea was to do everything by committee but, before very long, it was discovered that if someone isn't willing to stand up and say "*I will take charge of this!*" either we will never get anything significant done, or we will wind up compromising ourselves to death. As a result, every so-called Communist country ended up being a virtual dictatorship where the 'power gap' and oppression of the populace was, in most cases, far worse than in the hierarchies they replaced.

## NAKED LEADERSHIP

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We also know from hard experience that leaderless committees are a less than ideal way to operate in a dynamic business environment.

You may have heard a variation of the old joke:

*What is an elephant? A cow designed by a committee...*

Committees inevitably wind up with chairpersons (leaders) because otherwise, all we would have is a talkfest. Maybe because of a lower threshold of frustration or a less esoteric thought-train, some people cannot stand to see a discussion go on forever. Someone, somewhere has to act, or else everything remains theory. At best we wind up compromising ourselves to death, so that where we needed a relatively simple base-model cow, we end up with a huge elephant that has all sorts of bits we don't need and none of the ones we do...

We all need someone to help us get where we are going. There has never been a sports team that successfully operated without a coach, no matter how brilliant the players. That is why when asked about the qualities of a leader, many people cite vision as essential.

Okay, fair enough. But what does that mean? Well that depends on whom you talk to. Many 'experts' and leadership commentators are in love with the idea that a leader has to be a visionary. HR books and magazines are full of grand ideas about how to create 'vision' as a leader. It is almost like a religion. As a result, some leaders get caught up in the idea of creating a grand vision and leading us into the future (cue the stirring band music, the waving flags, the cheering crowds), but in reality, unless you're the big boss, leadership is far more often about creating a progression of short-term goals and tying them into the long-term vision that is delivered 'from above'.

I believe that there is far too much emphasis on vision and not enough on what has to happen during pursuit of the goals. This creates a cycle of over-promising and under-delivering. Any half-decent speaker can whip people into a frenzy, but if the follow-up isn't done and the results don't appear, people become jaded and disappointed. You only get so many chances.