values were more important to her, but getting to the other side of feeling disloyal to her loved ones was a painful process as she moved toward a more deliberate integration of herself.

. . .

The dangers of exercising leadership derive from the nature of the problems for which leadership is necessary. Adaptive change stimulates resistance because it challenges people's habits, beliefs, and values. It asks them to take a loss, experience uncertainty, and even express disloyalty to people and cultures. Because adaptive change forces people to question and perhaps redefine aspects of their identity, it also challenges their sense of competence. Loss, disloyalty, and feeling incompetent: That's a lot to ask. No wonder people resist.

Since the resistance is designed to get you to back away, the various forms may be hard to recognize. You may not see the trap until it is too late. Recognizing these dangers, then, becomes of paramount importance.

2

The Faces of Danger

The dangers of leadership take many forms. Although each organization and culture has its preferred ways to restore equilibrium when someone upsets the balance, we've noticed four basic forms, with countless ingenious variations. When exercising leadership, you risk getting marginalized, diverted, attacked, or seduced. Regardless of the form, however, the point is the same. When people resist adaptive work, their goal is to shut down those who exercise leadership in order to preserve what they have.

Organizations are clever about this. Each of these forms has its subtleties. What makes them effective is that they are not obvious. So, people trying to exercise leadership are often pushed aside by surprise. For example, betrayal often comes from places and people you don't expect. Some individuals may not even realize that they are being used to betray you. We know from personal experience that when you are caught up in the action, carrying a cause you believe in, it can be difficult to see the patterns. Over and over again we have heard stories of people exercising leadership who never saw the danger coming until it was too late to respond.

Marginalization

Getting marginalized sometimes takes literal form. In the 1970s, at the old U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW), Marty knew a high-ranking, respected, long-time employee named Seth, who began aggressively questioning a new plan designed to fundamentally change the way that HEW delivered social services. The reform was the brainchild and the most important initiative of Seth's boss, the HEW secretary. Seth argued sincerely, but provocatively and repeatedly, raising doubts about the value of something close to the heart of the chief. No one wanted to hear his questions.

One day Seth came into work and found his desk moved into a corridor. His senior colleagues had given most of his responsibilities to others. He believed in his initiatives and questions, and his martyrdom initially appealed to him, but not for long. He soon left the agency and his disturbing questions were no longer heard.

Most of the time organizations marginalize people less directly. An African-American man tells of his frustration at being part of a management team but finding his input limited on any issue other than race. A woman, promoted through the civilian side into a senior management role in an organization dominated by military personnel, notices that her colleagues listen to her only when the topic of discussion concerns information technology, her particular field of expertise. Unlike the rest of the senior managers—all men—her views are not taken seriously when she strays beyond her defined field of competence.

Many women have told us that in male-dominated organizations they were encouraged, and even told they were hired, to carry the gender issue for the whole organization. But they learned painfully that "tokenism" is a very tricky role to play effectively, and costs dearly. When a person or a small group of people embodies an issue and carries it prominently within the organization as a token, then the organization as a whole never has to take on the issue. It can feign the virtue of diversity, but avoid the challenge diverse views pose to its way of doing business. The women therefore were

unable to move the issue into the heart of the organization. Moreover, when they raised a different perspective on whatever task was at hand, people would roll their eyes and say to themselves, "There she goes again." Singing the gender song so regularly gave the other members of the group a fake excuse not to listen on any other subject.

A good example can be found in a mid-1990s diversity initiative of the New England Aquarium.[1] The Aquarium opened in 1969, at the leading edge of the revitalization of Boston's waterfront. An instant hit, it quickly attracted about a million visitors annually, well in excess of the 600,000-person capacity that its planners had designed. But beginning in the mid-1980s, the board of trustees and the senior staff began to be concerned that members of Boston's minority communities were consistently underrepresented among the institution's visitors, employees, and volunteers. Various initiatives directed at people of color during the next decade had not made any noticeable difference. In 1992, a cultural diversity committee of the trustees developed a strategy to attract minority youths as volunteers, which served as the hiring pool for new paid employees. Additions to the Aquarium's mission statement in 1992 reflected a new priority on increased diversity in its staff and visitors.

The most visible effort toward meeting this new priority was the establishment of a summer intern program for minority interns in the Aquarium's education department. Unlike the regular summer interns, these interns were to be paid. The funds came primarily from outside sources that supported summer jobs for students whose families met federal poverty guidelines.

As is often the case, this problem had both a technical aspect ("How can we get more people of color into the Aquarium?") and an adaptive aspect ("Which of our values are keeping people of color away from our door, and are we willing to change them?"). The nature, design, and location of this program were strong signals that the trustees wanted to address only the technical piece.

There was little advance planning for the seven high school students who showed up for the new intern program in the summer

of 1992. Deemed a modest success, the Aquarium expanded the program to thirty interns the following summer. But the second year did not go as well. The resulting space crunch created tensions with other volunteers, particularly with the other high school and college interns who resented that the minority interns were being paid for doing the same work they were doing for free. The minority interns had been selected by the funding agencies and had not expressed any particular interest in the Aquarium or its work. The staff had issues concerning their behavior, attendance, attitude, and even dress. Although these problems were not unique to the new volunteers, because the group had distinguishing characteristics, they were more visible.

Late in the summer of 1993 the Aquarium hired into the education department Glenn Williams, an African American, to take lead responsibility for programs involving inner-city youth. Williams was older than the other educators in the department, the only African American, and, unlike most of his colleagues, without academic training in relevant fields. By the end of 1994, Williams had raised enough outside money to develop two additional programs for inner-city youth to complement the summer jobs program. As Williams's program expanded, so did the tensions with the rest of the Aquarium staff, in his education department and elsewhere, whose cooperation he needed if the programs were to be integrated into the institution. As long as he kept the program small and did not interfere with anything else, it was okay.

Brick walls could not have done a better job of marginalizing the diversity issue at the Aquarium. The minority interns never fit in, and the program failed. Although the trustees earnestly wanted to share their vision of a great Aquarium with people of color, they were not particularly interested in changing the Aquarium itself—its operations, culture, and ways of doing business—to attract minority visitors. Williams, frustrated, eventually left the Aquarium. From his perch at the lower end of the authority structure, he could not redesign the whole institution's diversity response. He had tried, but his complaints had not been addressed. The institution

from the top down really did not want to face the implications of the deep changes that would have to be undertaken throughout the Aquarium to make it accessible in every way to lower economic constituencies and communities of color. Williams had not seen the problems earlier because he believed in the diversity goal, he trusted the supportive and well-intentioned words of the higher-ups, and he was committed to the kids in the internship and other programs. The programs themselves were fine, but the role they were playing in the overall organization served to marginalize the issue, not resolve it.

We sometimes collude unwittingly with our marginalizers. A thirty-five-year-old well-established synagogue appointed a young rabbi to be its head rabbi. The retiring rabbi had led the congregation for thirty-two of those thirty-five years.

At first, everything seemed just perfect for the young man. His predecessor said all of the right things, both publicly and privately. He promised to let go. He said he supported the many modernizing changes the new rabbi had talked about instituting during his many interviews for the job. But the new rabbi began to notice some unsettling patterns. When he went to a congregant's house for dinner, his predecessor ate there as well, usually seated next to him. Frequently, people having weddings, bar and bat mitzvahs, and funerals would ask the senior man to share the responsibilities for performing the ceremonies. More important, when he asked his predecessor for advice and counsel on specific changes he wanted to make in the liturgy or ritual, he received a polite but less than enthusiastic response, which was similar to what he heard from senior members of the congregation. So, he would hold off.

He continued to respond to the elder man with great respect, always deferring, agreeing to the joint activities, postponing changes, and generally, from his point of view, demonstrating a willingness to wait until the path forward was clear. He even passed on speaking engagements that came to the synagogue. He continued to attribute the prolonged transition to an understandable sensitivity to the former rabbi's feelings.

After a while, however, the new rabbi realized that he had unwittingly cooperated with a broad effort to suspend the uncertain future and retain the more familiar and comfortable past represented by the rabbi who had led the congregation for so long. Both the older rabbi and the congregation wanted to avoid as long as possible the hard work of facing the change and the challenges that would inevitably follow the retirement of the elder and the institution of a new spiritual leader for the synagogue. The younger man colluded with the rest of the community in delaying the pain of transition.

Eventually the young man saw the dynamics and his role in it. But by then the congregation had so undermined his authority and credibility that he saw no way to succeed in the role. People in the faction that had pushed hard for hiring him were disillusioned with his go-slow approach. And those who were most resistant to change were invigorated by their success in holding on to what they had. Despairing, the young rabbi resigned.

Marginalization often comes in more seductive forms. For example, it may come in the guise of telling you that you are special, *sui generis*, that you alone represent some important and highly valued idea, with the effect of keeping both you and the idea in a little box. First, the role of "special person" keeps you from playing a meaningful part on other issues. You are kept from being a generalist. Second, after a while you are devalued even on your own issue, because it's all people hear you talking about. Third, as with other forms of marginalization like tokenism, the organization can sing its own praises for welcoming unusual people without investigating the relevance and implications of their work to the central mission of the enterprise. If only you can do what you do, then the organization doesn't have to develop and institutionalize your innovation.

In several of these examples, the people exercising leadership and getting marginalized did not hold senior positions of authority in their organizations. Marginalization, however, can happen to anybody, including those on top. Authority figures can be

sidelined, particularly when they allow themselves to become so identified with an issue that they become the issue.

President Lyndon Johnson took the Vietnam War personally. Understandably, he did not want to be the first U.S. president to preside over a defeat. He also did not want his secretary of defense, Robert McNamara, to take the heat for the war, and by 1966, antiwar activists were calling it "McNamara's War." So Johnson took the heat himself, and soon the war protesters began to chant, "Hey, ho, LBJ must go." That was probably the most polite of the slogans they yelled at him. Naively, the protesters substituted defeating Johnson for a much harder problem, namely, getting Congress and the public to choose between extracting the country from Vietnam and accepting defeat, or making the huge financial and human sacrifice that might have enabled the country to win the war. Initially, Johnson did not see the danger of taking on himself so much responsibility for escalating the war and letting Congress and the public off the hook for these tough choices. Indeed, he began to take the war as personally as the activists who targeted him. Eventually, however, he realized that the personalization of the war both impeded debate about the conflict and made him ineffective in advancing his extraordinary domestic agenda. By joining the orchestra, he had given up his baton. To his credit, he decided to step down from the presidency rather than seek reelection in 1968.[2]

Personalization tends toward marginalization. Embodying an issue may be a necessary though risky strategy, particularly for people leading without authority. However, for people in senior authority positions, embodying the issue can be even more perilous. Authorities commonly have to represent a variety of constituents. They rarely can afford to embody one issue. They need to keep their hands free so they can orchestrate conflicts, rather than become the object of conflict. And, as we will discuss later, embodying an issue in your authority role ties your survival, not just your success, to that of the issue. That's a dangerous platform on which to stand.

Diversion

Another time-honored way to push people aside is to divert them.

There are many ways in which communities and organizations will consciously or subconsciously try to make you lose focus. They do this sometimes by broadening your agenda, sometimes by overwhelming it, but always with a seemingly logical reason for disrupting your game plan.

Opponents of the Vietnam War enticed Martin Luther King, Jr., into expanding his agenda from civil rights to the war. Of course, they had a rationale for his doing so. Widening his agenda appealed not only to King's moral convictions, but also perhaps to his own self-importance and prowess, fueled legitimately by the enormous progress made on civil rights. But as hard as the civil rights struggle had been in the South, some of the hardest issues—namely, ending racial intolerance in the North—were yet to be addressed. Diverting King's attention to the Vietnam War had the dual effect of generating even greater solidarity with northern liberals who felt moral antiwar outrage, without challenging them personally. He might have strained those relationships had he brought the civil rights movement to their communities, schools, law firms, and corporations. Their lives would have been disrupted, their values questioned, and their behaviors and practices scrutinized. They would have been on television either defending their way of life or denouncing it in front of their friends and neighbors.

King turned his attention to opposing the Vietnam War with terrible results. His core constituents, Southern black people, were not with him. They knew that too much work still lay ahead in the South as well as in the North. Not only did King achieve little success on the Vietnam War issue, but by losing his focus, he became less available to lead the movement beyond establishing the foundations of equality, like voting rights. Facing complex issues in northern cities and ghettos, the movement bogged down.

Some people are promoted or given new, glamorous responsibilities as a way of sidetracking their agenda. Whenever you get an unexpected promotion, or when some fun or important tasks are added to your current role, pause and ask yourself: Do I represent some disquieting issue from which the organization is moving to divert me, and itself, from addressing? We know a cantankerous newspaper columnist who found herself promoted to an editor's position as much to silence her provocative writing as to make use of her editing skills. We also know a primary school principal in the poorest community in her Missouri school district whose extraordinary success with students and parents generated sufficient disturbance among some teachers (whom she rode pretty hard) that the school superintendent promoted her to district headquarters to serve as a consultant. He even touted his ingenuity in finding a way to get her out of the primary school she had spent twenty years working to transform, with the goal of restoring "order and calm" to his school system. Corporate management will sometimes calm the waters by promoting union rabble-rousers into exempt positions, in the hope that the next generation of union leadership will be more cooperative.

People in top authority positions can easily be diverted by getting lost in other people's demands and programmatic details. Our friend Elizabeth was about to achieve a long-time ambition to become head of the state human services agency with a multi-billion-dollar budget, thousands of employees, and the well-being of hundreds of thousands of people under her charge. She yearned for the job because, having watched the agency for years, she had a long list of initiatives and reforms that she thought would make a difference. She understood that she was going to upset some people wedded to the current system, but with courage and strength, she felt confident that she could see change through. She did not, however, take stock of two important dynamics.

First, she knew her various constituencies both inside and outside the agency disagreed deeply among themselves on the size, scope, and delivery systems for various health and welfare programs. But she did not realize that they agreed on one thing,

namely, that Elizabeth should focus on their collective set of issues, whatever they were, rather than on her own or anyone else's. And second, she didn't understand that they could squash her agenda more easily by overwhelming her with demands and details than by fighting her head-on.

As she was about to take the job, Marty suggested that they have lunch in six months to see how she was progressing on the list of things she wanted to accomplish. Then she charged off into the fray. The lunch date came. Elizabeth looked frustrated.

"What happened?" Marty asked. "It's the most amazing thing," she replied. "I've never been so busy. My appointment calendar is full, and each meeting is important. Many are contentious. I am working more hours than I ever did before. I'm exhausted at the end of every day. I take work home on the weekend. But I have barely begun to work on my agenda. I finally realized that since I've been in the job, I've only seen a hundred or so people. It's as if they all got together, whatever their differences, and agreed to keep me so busy with their lists, that I would never get to anything on my list!"

Known as a workaholic, Elizabeth is extremely conscientious. She takes pride in answering her phone calls and staying in touch with her constituencies, even those who disagree with her. She enjoys intense policy debates. The folks in the human services world knew that.

She was right. They *had* gotten together, albeit not in a literal sense. Warren Bennis calls it the Unconscious Conspiracy to take you off your game plan.[3] Diversion by inbox-stuffing kept Elizabeth's eyes off the ball. It kept her immersed in the perspectives, problems, and infighting that had bedeviled others for years. The technique worked; it was much more effective than if folks had tried to battle her directly on her own issues.

Attack

Attacking you personally is another tried-and-true method of neutralizing your message. Whatever the form of the attack, if the

attackers can turn the subject of the conversation from the issue you are advancing to your character or style, or even to the attack itself, it will have succeeded in submerging the issue. Attention, the currency of leadership, gets wasted. If you can't draw people's attention to the issues that matter, then how can you lead them in the right direction or mobilize any progress?

You have probably been attacked in one form or another. Perhaps you've been criticized for your style of communication: too abrasive or too gentle, too aggressive or too quiet, too conflictive or too conciliatory, too cold or too warm. In any case, we doubt that anyone ever criticizes your character or your style when you're giving them good news or passing out big checks. For the most part, people criticize you when they don't like the message. But rather than focus on the content of your message, taking issue with its merits, they frequently find it more effective to discredit you. Of course, you may be giving them opportunities to do so; surely every one of us can continue to improve our style and our self-discipline. The point is not that you are blameless, but that the blame is largely misplaced in order to draw attention away from the message itself.

The most obvious form of a diverting attack is physical. You might remember the protests at the World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting in Seattle, Washington, in the fall of 1999. The protesters were interested in raising issues about WTO policies and their impacts on poor people, on jobs in the United States, and on the environment. The local law enforcement officials were interested in protecting the security of the delegates and their meeting. The WTO delegates were interested in keeping the debate focused on their concerns and not on the protesters' agenda. Whether intentional or not, the physical contact between the police and the protesters had the effect of making the fight, not the issues, the focus of public attention. The squabbles between protesters and police took the protesters' agenda out of the news.

People become easily diverted by physical attack. It's full of drama. It hurts. Some people are repulsed by it; some are drawn to it in a macabre kind of way. Whatever the reaction, the spectacle of violence is effective in moving people away from any underlying,

deeply troubling issues. For example, an angry outburst that turns physical in a family immediately replaces the primary issues with the issue of the violence itself. The violent person loses legitimacy for his or her perspective and unwittingly colludes with the offended parties in sabotaging the discussion of his or her views.

In the 2000 presidential election, an unplanned personal attack created diversionary news. In an aside to his running mate Dick Cheney, George W. Bush used a vulgarity to describe Adam Clymer, a longtime *New York Times* political reporter. Bush had not realized that the microphones were on, and he felt embarrassed when his remark was overheard. The press attacked Bush, using the incident to raise issues about his character. No one bothered to analyze whether Bush was on to something, whether Clymer's articles had been fair and responsible or had been biased in favor of the Democratic nominee. And Bush, by making it personal, unwittingly served up the distraction and diminished his capacity to raise the issue of journalistic bias.

Assassinations, like those of Yitzhak Rabin and Anwar Sadat, are the most extreme examples of a silencing attack as a way of stopping the voices of difficult realities. Both assassinations set back the cause of peace in the Middle East, delaying the day when people would have to experience loss of land and disloyalty to their ancestors, in order to thrive in today's interdependent world.

Fortunately, your opponents, those people most disturbed by your message, are far more likely to use verbal rather than physical attacks. The attacks may go after your character, your competence, or your family, or may simply distort and misrepresent your views. They will come in whatever form your opponents think will work. Through trial and error, they will find your Achilles' heel. They will come at you wherever you are most vulnerable.

In politics, people frequently finger-point at character to deflect attention from the issues. For much of Bill Clinton's eight years in the White House, his ideological opponents came after him not on the issues but on his character. They found an obvious Clinton vulnerability. As you know, he provided them with ammunition. The

personal attacks on him succeeded considerably in diverting him from his policy agenda. It's quite interesting that the conservatives were not threatened by all of his agenda. Quite to the contrary, Clinton threatened them because some of his agenda was theirs. Clinton was stealing their issues, such as welfare reform and the balanced budget, and if he succeeded, his leverage to promote the detested aspects of his agenda would increase substantially.

The function of attacking Clinton on character was no different than the function of attacking Clarence Thomas on character during his hearings for confirmation to the U.S. Supreme Court. Opponents went after him personally because they had great difficulty defeating his nomination on the issues. Thomas did not fit the mold of an easy-to-oppose conservative judicial nominee. He was an African American with not much of a paper trail documenting his judicial philosophy or political ideology. He was no easy target like G. Harrold Carswell, the intellectually, professionally, and judicially undistinguished southern conservative whom Richard Nixon nominated to the Supreme Court in 1970. He was not even as vulnerable as Robert Bork, Ronald Reagan's unsuccessful 1987 nominee, who had written extensively and whose published views were anathema to many members of the U.S. Senate. But like Clinton, Thomas had somehow made himself vulnerable to attacks on his character, particularly the sexual harassment charges from Anita Hill and others.

Attacks may take the form of misrepresentation. Early in his tenure, President Bill Clinton nominated Lani Guinier to be assistant attorney general for civil rights. She enjoyed a reputation as a brilliant law school professor, a trusted friend of Bill and Hillary Clinton, and a creative thinker. She believed strongly in government action to ensure individual rights, and she would likely have made the Civil Rights Division a visible and aggressive activist agency. However, a search of her writings found a law review article in which she analyzed the issue of political representation.[4] In fact, her notion of proportional representation was not a new or crazy idea. In political theory, her argument had both respectability

and a long history, similar to arguments about the principles upon which voting district lines should be drawn. Moreover, the argument that drew attack represented only one thought in an article full of ideas, and it appeared in one law review article by a woman who had written several. But focusing on it provided an opportunity for her opponents to label her the "Quota Queen."

The misrepresentation placed Clinton in a tough position. He could have taken on the difficult task of trying to explain that the clever, memorable, and politically unacceptable label "Quota Queen" was a distortion, and then draw the focus back to the real issue—the difficult challenges she would indeed represent as an activist on civil rights. Or, he could accede to the misrepresentation and then either tough it out and defend her, or let her go. He chose the easiest route and let her go. His opponents had reason to know that's what he would choose because he had already backed away from other nominees and issues when the heat became uncomfortable. But by doing so once again, he gave his opponents more reason to believe that continued misrepresentations and character attacks would indeed serve their purposes.

It is difficult to resist responding to misrepresentation and personal attack. We don't want to minimize how hard it is to keep your composure when people say awful things about you. It hurts. It does damage. Anyone who's been there knows that pain. Exercising leadership often risks having to bear such scars.

Later, in part two of this book, we explore many ways to respond to misrepresentation and attack. But first you have to recognize the effort for what it often is, a way to divert your attention from an issue that is more troubling to people. Fundamentally, the dynamic is no different in a family than on the national stage. When your teenager in an angry outburst calls you names, in your best moments you know you ought to stop and ask, "What's this really about?" Perhaps your son can't stand having to depend on you, once again, to drive him places. Or he might be just testing to see if you really care for him enough to stick to the curfew you have imposed. It may be a great deal more productive, though challenging, to negotiate with him over the issues of responsibility and dependency than to get into another personal fight. But it is not easy to do.

When the Manchester, New Hampshire, *Union Leader* attacked Senator Edmund Muskie's wife during the 1972 presidential campaign, describing her in negative and demeaning language, he took it personally and responded accordingly, shedding what appeared to be a tear in her defense and making the same diagnostic mistake. His opponents were trying to derail his campaign and undermine the power of his stands on the issues. They didn't care about his wife one way or the other. Once Muskie withdrew from the campaign, she became a nonissue. By responding to the misrepresentation personally, Muskie colluded with the attacker in distracting the public from the real target.

Seduction

Many forms of bringing you down have a seductive dimension. We use the word *seduction,* a politically charged word, as a way of naming the process by which you lose your sense of purpose altogether, and therefore get taken out of action by an initiative likely to succeed because it has a special appeal to you. In general, people are seduced when their guard is down, when their defense mechanisms have been lowered by the nature of the approach.

We are not talking about neurotic needs only. People are diverted by initiatives that meet normal, human interests, too. One of the everyday forms of seduction, for example, is the desire for the approval of your own faction, your own supporters.

An old aphorism attributed to the late Speaker of the House of Representatives, Tip O'Neill, advises, "Always dance with the one who brought you." It's about loyalty to your own people. But that advice, appealing as it is, carries with it a significant risk.

When you are trying to create significant change, to move a community, the people in your own faction in that community will have

to compromise along the way. Often, the toughest part of your job is managing *their* disappointed expectations. They may well support change, but they also want you to ensure that the change will come with minimal sacrifice on their part. Tacitly, or perhaps explicitly, your own people will instruct you to get the job done by having the people from the other factions make the tough trade-offs.

Disappointing your own core supporters, your deepest allies on your issue, creates hardships for you and for them. Yet you make yourself vulnerable when you too strongly give in to the understandable desire to enjoy their continuing approval, rather than disappoint them. Over and over again we have seen people take on difficult issues, only to be pushed by their own faction so far out on a limb that they lose credibility in the larger community.

Several years before the signing of the Good Friday peace agreement in Ireland, Marty facilitated a gathering of representatives from all but the most militant of the political parties and factions in Northern Ireland. Tentativeness and tension filled the room. Many of the participants had never been in the same space with their most hated opponents. Some of the participants would not talk to others. They refused to pose for a group picture.

They began to discuss a conflict resolution case set in a very different time and place. They conversed slowly, with care and caution. They moved on to the question of how the protagonist in the case had managed his own employees and the difficulty of bringing them along. Suddenly, the talk in the room intensified. The Northern Ireland antagonists began to talk with each other without Marty's intervention. They found common ground in the difficulty they were all having managing their own people.

They realized that they faced a shared dilemma. They understood that the way to peace meant giving something up, but each of their factions wanted to be represented by someone who promised not to yield anything. If the representatives tried to educate their own people on the need to bear some loss, they would be challenged by a potential successor who promised to hold the hard line. Beyond this tactical challenge to their authority, they sought

and desired the approval and support of their own people as they entered difficult conversations with their opponents. The applause of their own factions gave them courage. It made them feel important and valued, and it gave them confidence that the risks they took were worth it. And yet the need for that applause and the desire to keep it ringing in their ears compromised their capacity to think purposefully about the larger change.

Negotiators describe a related dynamic called "the constituency problem." Every labor negotiator knows it well: the experience of being yanked back into the previous posture by workers who have not gone through the same compromising and learning process that the primary negotiators have endured (often lasting many long nights). Unprepared for giving up on any of their goals, they boo and hiss the "compromiser," branding him disloyal to the cause.

Marty experienced this himself in 1992, when he joined the administration of Massachusetts governor William Weld as chief secretary, responsible for personnel and politics. He enjoyed a reputation for being more liberal than most of the senior staff in the governor's office. He felt not the slightest embarrassment. To the contrary, he was comfortable with his beliefs and even assumed that Weld hired him, in part, to broaden the range of viewpoints the governor heard on a regular basis. Most of Marty's friends outside of the government held more liberal views than he did; they were happy to see him get a good job, but skeptical that he took a job in a Republican administration that had been doing a lot of budget slashing in its first year.

The liberal interest groups, such as the advocates for gay rights and women's rights, applauded his appointment. They saw him as their conduit into the conversations in the governor's office. And Marty enjoyed the role and their approval, too much perhaps. The advocates knew, and constantly told him, that they would not know what to do or how to be heard within the governor's office if he were not there.

Marty began to rely on their flattery, to enjoy being indispensable to them, so much so that he never noticed what was gradually

happening. The advocates pushed him to do more and go further, which appeared to him to be the price for their continuing approval. Instead of pushing back on the advocates to depend less on him and broaden their base of support and leverage, Marty opted for the special status he needed to feel significant in his role.

As a result, his voice within the councils of the governor's office narrowed and his tone sounded more shrill as he pressed the issues harder. His effectiveness seeped away, day by day. He was seduced by his own desire to "do the right thing" and, more important, to have the support of people whose values he shared. But the costs weighed heavy. Confined more and more to being the carrier of unpopular causes, he slowly but inexorably became less successful in moving them along, and increasingly was cut out of the conversation on other issues.

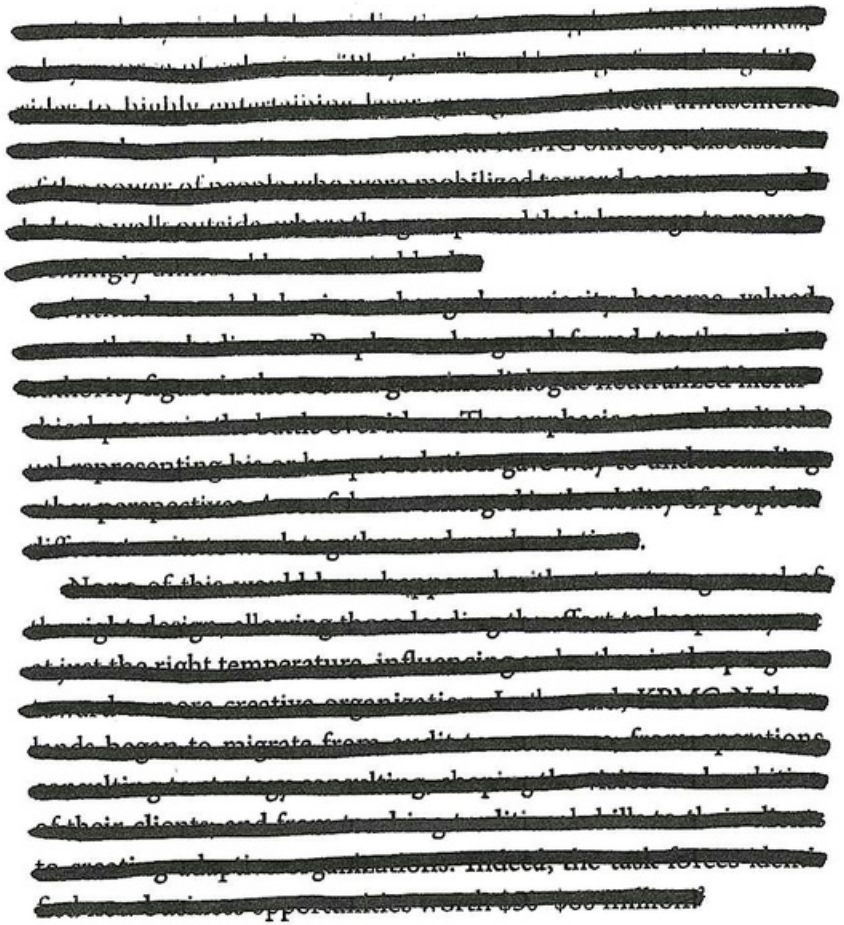
Although the advocates surely did not intend to undermine him, by conditioning their approval on his increasingly strident advocacy of their interests, they forced him to choose between their continuing loyalty and his diminishing success in the wider community.

. . .

Seduction, marginalization, diversion, and attack all serve a function. They reduce the disequilibrium that would be generated were people to address the issues that are taken off the table. They serve to maintain the familiar, restore order, and protect people from the pains of adaptive work. It would be wonderful if adaptive work did not involve hard transitions, adjustments, and loss in people's lives. Because it does, it usually produces resistance. Being aware of the likelihood of receiving opposition in some form is critical to managing it when it arrives. Leadership, then, requires not only reverence for the pains of change and recognition of the manifestations of danger, but also the skill to respond.

PART TWO

The Response



Control the Temperature

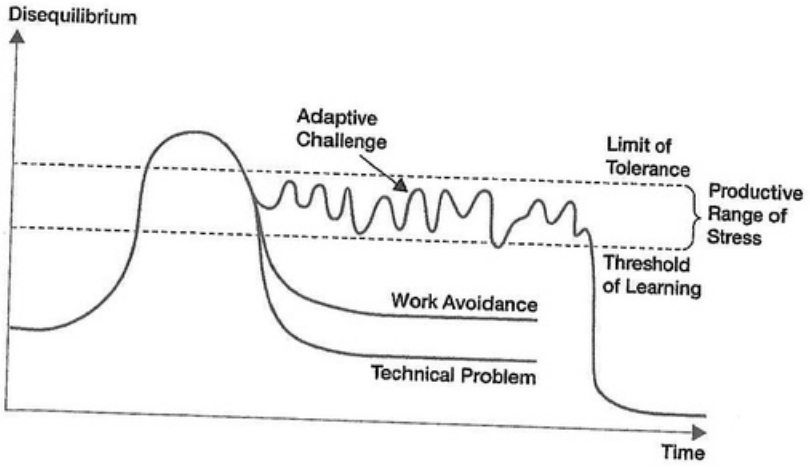
Changing the status quo generates tension and produces heat by surfacing hidden conflicts and challenging organizational culture. It's a deep and natural human impulse to seek order and calm, and organizations and communities can tolerate only so much stress before recoiling.

If you try to stimulate deep change within an organization, you have to control the temperature. There are really two tasks here. The first is to raise the heat enough that people sit up, pay attention,

and deal with the real threats and challenges facing them. Without stress, there is less stimulus for people to tolerate difficult change. The second is to lower the temperature when necessary to reduce a counterproductive level of tension. Any community can take only so much pressure before it becomes either immobilized or spins out of control. The heat must stay within a tolerable range—not so high that people demand it be turned off completely, and not so low that they are lulled into inaction. We call this span the productive range of stress. (See the figure "Technical Problem or Adaptive Challenge?")

Of course, you can't expect the group to tolerate more stress than you can stand yourself. When you develop your own capacity for taking heat, you raise the tolerance level of the organization or community. But if you lose your poise and turn down the flame, people will take that as a cue that the passions generated cannot be contained. The stress will appear intolerable. In political campaigns, people often look to the candidate to set the standard for the

Technical Problem or Adaptive Challenge?



Source: Ronald A. Heifetz and Donald C. Laurie, "Mobilizing Adaptive Work: Beyond Visionary Leadership," in Jay A. Conger, Gretchen M. Spreitzer, and Edward E. Lawler III, eds., *The Leader's Change Handbook: An Essential Guide to Setting Direction and Taking Action* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1998).

tolerance of stress. If the candidate blows, it's unlikely that anyone else on the staff will be able to focus on the campaign. The same is true when you are in an authority role in any realm: as project manager, coach or captain of a team, or lead investor in a high-risk venture. There is tremendous pressure on you to control your own natural emotional responses, which may be entirely appropriate and normal to express, except within the role you are trying to play.

People expect the boss to control the temperature, but those without formal authority can do some of this work as well. If you are leading without or beyond your authority, you must assess how far ahead of people you are and then adjust how hard and fast to push for change. As we suggested in chapter 3, one way you make that assessment is to carefully monitor the response of the authority figure to your actions. If the authority figure starts to act precipitously to calm things down—for example, by firing "the troublemakers" or taking action to squelch deviant voices—it probably indicates that you have pushed too hard. The level of social disequilibrium is too high.

You can constructively raise the temperature and the tension in two ways. First, bring attention to the hard issues, and keep it focused there. Second, let people feel the weight of responsibility for tackling those issues. Conflicts will surface within the relevant group as contrary points of view are heard.

By contrast, there are many ways to reduce the heat, since organizations are more practiced at cooling things down than intentionally heating them up. Any method for reducing the heat may also be used as an indirect way of increasing the upper limits of tolerance for it within the organization. To reduce heat you can start on the technical problems, deferring adaptive challenges until people are "warmed up." A little progress on a partial, relatively easy problem may reduce anxiety enough that the tougher issues can then be tackled. Negotiators commonly use this tactic: Strengthen the relationships—the holding environment—by creating shared successes. You can provide structure to the problem-solving process, by breaking down the problem into its parts, creating working

groups with clear role assignments, setting time parameters, establishing decision rules, and structuring reporting relationships. You can frame the problem in a less threatening way, or speak to people's fears. You can temporarily bear more of the responsibility yourself. You can use humor or find an excuse for a break, even a party, to provide a temporary release. People may then be able to return to the tough questions. You can separate the conflicting parties and issues, pacing and sequencing the rate at which people challenge one another. Finally, you can speak to transcendent values so that people can be reminded of the import of their efforts and sacrifices. (See "How to Control the Heat.")

Be mindful that the organization will almost always, reflexively, want you to turn down the heat. Therefore, you need to take the temperature of the group constantly, trying to keep it high enough to motivate people, but not so high that it paralyzes them. When people come to you to describe the stress you are causing, it might be a sign that you have touched a nerve and are doing good work.

When the heat hits the ceiling and the system appears on the verge of melting down, you need to cool things off. History provides some striking examples in which people in authority believed that the level of chaos, tension, and anxiety in the community had risen too high to constructively mobilize people to act on difficult issues. As a result, they first acted to reduce the anxiety to a tolerable level, and then made sure enough urgency remained to stimulate engagement and change.

Franklin D. Roosevelt came to power in 1933 amidst the deepening crisis of the Great Depression. After more than three years of economic collapse, with millions unemployed and the nation's banks approaching insolvency, the country had reached a very high level of anxiety and, in many regions, outright despair. The United States faced adaptive work of a magnitude that strained even its boisterous confidence and ingenuity.

The unprecedented level of distress reached during this national crisis, and the resulting conflict and disorientation, called forth all sorts of distorted schemes to calm the country and restore a firm footing, from the demagogic initiatives of Father Coughlin to the

HOW TO CONTROL THE HEAT

Raise the Temperature

1. Draw attention to the tough questions.
2. Give people more responsibility than they are comfortable with.
3. Bring conflicts to the surface.
4. Protect gadflies and oddballs.

Lower the Temperature

1. Speak to people's anger, fear, and disorientation.
2. Take action. Structure the problem-solving process—break the problem into parts, and create time frames, decision rules, and clear role assignments.
3. Slow down the process. Pace and sequence the issues and who you bring to the table.
4. Be visible and present—shoulder responsibility and provide confidence.
5. Orient people—reconnect people to their shared values, and locate them in an arc of change over time.
6. Low-hanging fruit—make short-term gains by prioritizing the technical aspects of the problem situation.

platform of the communist party. As the nation's preeminent authority figure, Roosevelt embodied the country's hope for a restoration of order without distorting its core values and institutions. All eyes were on him for direction and protection. His first priority had to be to reduce disequilibrium, to lower the distress so that the nation would be less vulnerable to demagogues and could make progress toward economic recovery.

To do this, Roosevelt had to speak to emotional realities. He had to calm the nation down, both in words and in action. In words, he spoke to people's anxiety ("the only thing we have to fear is fear

itself"), to their anger (calling the bankers "money changers"), and to their disorientation (with intimate and reassuring fireside chats). His actions conveyed the same message, providing hope and calming fears. Roosevelt's decisive and authoritative action—the famous "one hundred days" in which he pushed an extraordinary number of bills through Congress—provided direction and helped reassure the American people that they were in capable hands. Roosevelt knew he was no savior—people would ultimately have to save themselves. But through his words and actions, he lowered the temperature just enough that people could focus constructively on the work ahead.

On the other hand, Roosevelt also knew that accomplishing the adaptive work facing the nation required improvisation, experiments, creativity, and conflict, and he fostered these all around. He orchestrated conflicts over public priorities and programs among the large cast of creative characters he brought into the government. For example, by giving the same assignment to two different people (driving them crazy over the lack of clear role definition), he provoked new and competing ideas, and gave himself more options with which to work. As hard as this improvisation must have been, he got the horns, the drums, and the flutes making music together.

Roosevelt displayed both the acuity to recognize when the tension rose too high and the emotional strength to permit considerable anxiety to exist. He had to resist the strong impulse toward quick fixes. Procrastination and delay were as much a part of his repertoire as decisive action. As Arthur Schlesinger points out, "Situations had to be permitted to develop, to crystallize, to clarify; the competing forces had to vindicate themselves in the actual pull and tug of conflict; public opinion had to face the question, consider it, and pronounce upon it. Only then, at the long, frazzled end, would the President's intuitions consolidate and precipitate a result."[3]

[redacted]

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