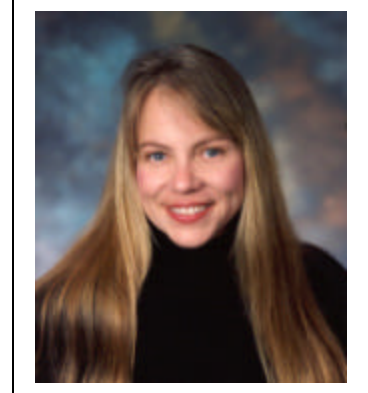


# BUILDING BLOCKS™

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***Ginger Jenks, MCC***

***Magellan Enterprises***

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## **Tough Leadership**

There are all kinds of articles and books on leadership, on why it's important, and how to do it. Lots of people say they want to be leaders. Why, then, is there such a dearth of effective leaders in our companies, communities and nations?

Leadership around charismatic, popular ideas is difficult enough. There's lots of work, consensus building, and lonely decision making. So what about difficult edicts? If you're not in the ultimate position of control, can you still lead? What if the consequences might be awful? What if you're expected to lead an initiative you're not 100% behind, but it's your responsibility to lead it anyway? How do you acquire and maintain the motivation to lead when secretly wishing someone else would lead this one?

Leadership is first and foremost, taking a stand. You can't straddle the fence and expect others to follow you; you're not going anywhere. Taking a stand is only effective if people know about it – so you need to communicate it clearly and to your entire audience. People then have a choice about whether they agree, disagree or are indifferent about your position, because they know what your position is.

From there you can build your coalition, working on persuading those who are in disagreement or indifferent, and practice damage control with known opponents. You will undoubtedly experience some exposure, discomfort, or even danger when you take a stand. That's why people respect it – it's not just taking the "safe" road, but taking risk in the belief of achieving something worthwhile.

What if you're unsure that the course you want to chart is the right course? Welcome to the club. Only egomaniacs are foolish enough to be 100% certain all the time about the direction they

*Continued on next page...*

choose. Ways to mitigate are to seek out trusted advisors, poll constituencies, or do scenario planning, among others. But sooner rather than later, a leader must move forward, making his/her decision based on the best information available within the time available. There may be a great deal of uncertainty involved, or just a hint of doubt. Executing, however, is what leaders do. Make a decision.

Put your heart into it. If reevaluation is required down the road, deal with it then. When putting forth a decision or leadership initiative, be 100% behind it. Otherwise, you'll be undermining your own leadership capabilities. Is this tough to do when you're feeling uncertain (or downright skeptical) about a particular leadership initiative? Of course. But that's where the rubber meets the road with leaders. You sometimes have to "fake it till you make it." No one really wants to follow someone who says "this might be the right direction," or "I don't think this is the right direction, but let's try it anyway." Your firmness of conviction can be the difference between an initiative succeeding, failing or stalling, based on how well you inspire those you lead. Great leaders can get others to follow them even against formidable odds (Gandhi, Martin Luther King), whereas many terrific ideas fail for lack of effective leadership.

What about when the odds are stacked against you? Call in your chips. You need to of course be accumulating chips all the time, so that you have some to use in time of need. This means supporting others, building relationships and contributing. This builds a reserve that can be called upon and that people can feel good about honoring. Calling in a chip should be in the form of a request, not a demand or even strong-arming. Effective, long-term leadership inspires. People ultimately follow a leader because they want to. Intimidating, short-term leadership coerces. People follow for a time because they feel they don't have a better choice. But as soon as there is a better choice, they'll abandon that leader.

Ultimately, when faced with a difficult leadership challenge, you need to make a choice. Am I the right person to be doing this? If my answer is yes, I need to do everything within my power to ensure that anyone else would think I'm the right person, too. Leadership skill is honed on sharp edges. How the most difficult, unpopular and risky challenges are handled is what differentiates the great from the merely good leaders.

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### **Cool Business For Sale**

Bicycle touring in Alaska, anyone? A client of mine is interested in selling her bicycle touring business in Alaska. This operation is both profitable and fun! If you have an interest, contact Joyce Waldman at (970) 385-8674 or [cycledog@frontier.net](mailto:cycledog@frontier.net)

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