

The Helm Club[®]

SETTING COURSE

A Newsletter Navigating the Challenges & Sharing the Waypoints for Healthcare Leaders via Peer-to-Peer Executive Coaching

“The pessimist complains about the wind; the optimist expects it to change; the realist and true leader adjusts the sails.”

-adapted from William Arthur Ward, writer

STEALTH SPOILERS – SOME POTENTIALLY LETHAL!

A day in the boat on the water is usually an opportunity to pursue pleasurable activities – fishing, sailing, sunbathing, good conversation – but sometimes there also come challenges. The pleasurable activities are certainly preferable. However, what some boaters fail to anticipate are potential challenges that are subtle and hidden from view and can be toxic – potentially even lethal. We are naturally drawn to the serenity, freedom, and beauty of a day at sea, but must remember the dangers that always lurk. It is the job of the captain and crew (leadership) to protect all from these subtle dangers – one of which is potentially lethal – carbon monoxide poisoning.

Carbon monoxide is a colorless, odorless, and tasteless gas that is produced by the incomplete combustion of fuels such as gasoline, diesel, and propane. Exhaust fumes from engines, generators, and even some neighboring vessels can release dangerously high levels of carbon monoxide. The odorless gas then binds to hemoglobin in the bloodstream reducing the ability of blood cells to carry oxygen. Deprived of vital oxygen, one can have symptoms including headache, dizziness, nausea, confusion, loss of consciousness with potential for coma, irreversible brain damage, and even death.

Likewise, a *day at the office* can be filled with eventful activities that are viewed as good, though some can potentially be challenging and toxic. Leaders need to be aware of some stealthy activities that can be detrimental to the lifeblood and culture of an organization. In particular, it's worth highlighting the powerful impact of language and communication that speaks ill of the organization, or conversation focused on constant criticism being derogatory toward people, plans, and activities of the organization. Attitude, demeanor, mode of dress, and even mannerisms that permeate an organization can, if constantly judgmental and disseminated with negativity, be unhelpful and result in stealthy harm to the organization's morale.

Leaders need to be aware of these sometimes tasteless, odorless, and ill-conceived forms of danger because, if left unchecked, they can inflict detrimental and unexpected harm. Fair complaints and critiques need to be met head-on constructively for issues to be addressed and corrected if they are bona fide. On the other hand, if verbiage and attitudes are not appropriate or not a catalyst for productive change, the leader needs to make sure that the person or persons with

such negative and derogatory attitudes are not allowed to inflict harm to the culture of the organization through their activities. Experientially, a good leader wants to address areas of concern and craft solutions. However, after an appropriate time, even after there seems to be progress in the right direction, *backdrafting* can still occur. **Backdrafting** is the



marine term for exhaust gases from a slow-moving boat, engine, or generator that can be drawn back into the vessel. This can be analogous to the poor attitudes, comments, and

behaviors of some people. Backdrafting occurs for a variety of reasons; slow navigation speed (perceptions that the organization is not moving as effectively at attaining strategic initiatives); poor ventilation (constant airing of problems and critiques); obstructions in the exhaust system (lack of engagement or forums to discuss problems); and unfavorable wind conditions (failure to help focus on priorities and agreed upon strategic initiatives). Backdrafting is particularly harmful. . . and prevalent. . . when a boat is moored or confined in a tight space with limited movement. From an organizational vantage point, little growth, the inability to keep good people or attract talent, and/or failure to achieve articulated goals and objectives, growth, and quality targets can make an organization particularly vulnerable to backdrafting.

The captain, crew, and leadership should focus on solutions based on simple principles:

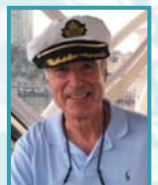
- ◆ **Educated and Concerned Leadership** – A leadership that is ethical, honest, has integrity, and demonstrates good character.
- ◆ **Great Engagement and Organizational Discipline**
- ◆ **Effective, Meaningful Communication** – Language genuinely focused on the organization's purpose and adept at keeping the people and teams energized in their efforts to attain short and long-term goals.

Attention to detail, engaged, growth-, and solution-focused leadership is always needed to address a plethora of problems that can arise in any business and to prevent backdrafting of bad ideas and toxic activities that are harmful to the organization. **HC**

“To reach a port, we must set sail – sail, not tie at anchor; sail, not drift.”

-Franklin D. Roosevelt, 32nd U.S. Pres.

—Ronald N. Riner, MD, Captain of The Riner Group, Inc.



Strategically, you may have to change course to reach the destination.