

LeaderShift: The Cost of “Good Enough”

By Joe Hunt

In organizations with “good-enough” cultures, billions of dollars are wasted each year by leaders and staffs who compromise on standards. Such leaders endanger themselves and their careers by permitting a “good-enough” mentality. This risk engenders widespread mediocrity, but fortunately, it has a remedy.

The good-enough culture plagues an organization in every aspect of its operation, all the way down to the most basic. Some of the more prominent effects are:

- **Lack of productivity**
- **Staff turnover**
- **Defective products**
- **Warranty costs**
- **Safety costs**
- **Inefficiency and waste**
- **Dissatisfied customers**
- **Lost sales**
- **Layoffs**
- **Shrinking profits**
- **Poor reputation**

Leaders experience many unseen problems buried down under the details of every department. If not corrected, these issues feed on themselves, and can easily snowball out of control.



“Only the mediocre are always at their best.”
Jean Giraudoux, French essayist

SLOW FAILURE

When organizations fail, it’s not always because they’ve crashed to the bottom. Leaders often cause slow failure simply by allowing mediocrity to set in. When things are “good enough,” people are lulled into complacency and a false sense of security. They are unprepared to respond effectively when the bleeding begins, and gradual decline ensues.

Caring about excellence is everything. A truthful leader molds a team that improves communication, timeliness and a thorough review of all difficult issues, large and small. A leader who’s considerate of others demonstrates the importance of relationships to success.

Leaders who commit to such responsibility raise the level of accountability within their staff. Employees who are held accountable by their manager, also hold each other to account. Determined leaders foster a group spirit that overcomes challenges that once made people surrender.

A good-enough culture, flows down from the top of the organization. It takes root when the actions of leadership allow their organizations to believe that a “good-enough” approach is acceptable.

Typically, leaders with a self-focused mindset, are more likely to enable good-enough cultures by openly demonstrating one or more of the following behaviors:

- **Apathy:** There is no real concern for what the others in the organization endure.
- **Laziness:** Feel there is no need to give more than an adequate effort. Adequate often seems heroic to the lazy mind.
- **Disengagement:** There is not enough involvement with staff or specific operations to know that troubles exist. Worse yet, the leader intentionally avoids knowledge of problems.
- **Greed:** There is less monetary reward for the upper echelon if more resources are spent on addressing system shortcomings. This is the age-old deception of believing a sacrifice today doesn't reward tomorrow.
- **Fear of failure:** There is too much risk seen in trying something that could make things worse. This fear emanates from a lack of wisdom or confidence.
- **Pride:** There is a need to preserve ego by avoiding acknowledgment of a problem.

- **Ignorance:** There is no pressing desire to know how the operation works, to grasp how it could be better.
- **Resentment:** There is a dislike of bad news and the people who bring it. And of course, nothing can be improved if it's not discussed.

Leaders who don't understand the power of excellence don't care enough about pursuing it. This lack of caring is what author, Subir Chowdhury claims is the main cause of a good-enough culture, in his book, *The Difference: When Good Enough Isn't Enough* (Penguin Random House, 2017).

When leaders don't care enough about being the best they can be, why would staff? Each layer in the organization takes its cue from the one above, and all of them ultimately from the top. Uncaring leaders set a strong example that caring is not needed by anyone. The result is mediocrity at best; total failure at worst. Leaders who are excellence-minded see both options as failure.



The
DIFFERENCE

*When Good Enough
Isn't Enough*

SUBIR CHOWDHURY

"If you're looking to create breakthroughs in your business and in your life, this book is for you." —TONY ROBBINS

GOOD ENOUGH SYMPTOMS IN LEADERS

Leaders often ignore the elephant on the conference room table. Certain bad topics are not discussed. Waves aren't made. Upsetting bosses with bad news or concerns is avoided at all costs. When staff leaves a meeting knowing an underlying issue is deliberately left unresolved, this is a sign that the status quo is too important to disrupt.

When red tape bogs down a process and is discussed with no effort to get to root causes, this is a trouble sign. In these instances, leaders simply want the bottleneck to go away by any means necessary, and there's no real concern for prevention or improvements. They permit an exception to the rules and everyone goes back about their business.

Leaders are more upset at delivery numbers than product quality when production non-conformance arises. Standards are conceded to get the product out the door, or leaders approve a band-aid for the problem, hoping it's just a limited issue. The concessions are easier than diving into the causes and effective solutions, because good enough is good enough.

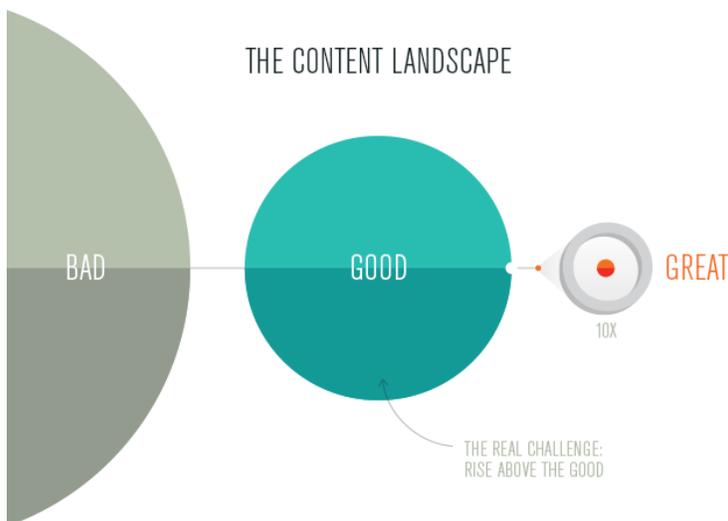
GOOD ENOUGH SYMPTOMS IN EMPLOYEES

People start blaming one another during stressful situations rather than trying to reach understanding. Gaining clarity and collaboration takes work, sometimes a lot of it. Leaders don't regard teamwork worth giving of their time and effort, so they allow their people to endure disunity.

Employees are skeptical of feedback forms, company surveys or information meetings because their voices are rarely valued, heard or acted upon. Suggestions go unanswered, survey results are not shared and organizational information has no real substance. Any improvements are minor, not requiring a significant investment. Leaders don't emphasize positive change.

Specific departments turnover, and exit interviews indicate a managerial problem. But leaders see it more difficult to replace a manager—with a higher salary requirement and a more complex recruitment process—than to continue finding new employees with fairly common skills. Leaders choose to make due, overlooking the manager's weaknesses.

These symptoms are a general indication that leaders don't really care enough about excellence to truly implement it, and probably don't understand how to.



OVERCOMING THE GOOD ENOUGH CULTURE

If your organization suffers from a good-enough culture, take heart. There are steps leaders can take in overcoming mediocrity.

TRUTHFULNESS/DIRECTNESS

Leaders who care about truth must instill a culture of transparency and honesty. When I work with leaders on this issue, they are advised to deal with trials directly and openly, and to reduce fear by welcoming feedback. This gives responsibility to staff to bring issues to the table and tackle them, with the incentive to solve them. Leaders who can accept bad news, and respond with fairness and understanding, establish higher levels of emotional safety, accountability, and excellence.

People learn to care about the day-to-day issues, and have a greater sense of empowerment to make things work better. Small successes lead to more, and succeeding becomes attractive. Leaders who care about making things right for everyone create a following of people who want to do the same. Being truthful and direct builds trust. And trust breeds higher standards.



“Nobody cares how much you know, until they know how much you care.” ~ Theodore Roosevelt

CONSIDERATION FOR OTHERS

Leaders who care about their people are attentive to them. I see great leaders show their people that they’re valued by engaging them, listening to them, and understanding them. Their communications demonstrate an empathetic mindset, where the leader is concerned about what their people are going through, and how things can be improved for them. This requires humility and genuineness. Such leaders care enough to be helpful and unselfish.

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People respond by returning a leader's consideration with consideration of their own. They know they're affirmed and appreciated, and this causes them to care about what the leader cares about, as well as each of their contributions. The staff becomes thankful and returns the leader's thoughtfulness with their best efforts. Quality becomes a desired trait of their work.

TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

Leaders who care about excellence demonstrate responsibility and instill the same in their people.

They accept critical feedback, but not without viable proposals for solutions. They don't accept a mentality of "it's not my job." Everyone participates and is expected to follow through on their assignments. Great leaders prompt everyone to add value and make positive changes.

This encourages engagement, positive outlooks, and a drive for the best ideas. These leaders forge the habit of analyzing strategies and their potential outcomes. An overall aim to enhance things for everyone is established.

Staffs respond by getting involved, taking action, and being answerable for what they do. Everyone strives for improvement, and they raise their expectations. People find it exhilarating to be responsible for their portion of the overall success. They feel a sense of unity, and are encouraged to ask for help when needed. Staff go the extra mile because they care, and because good enough is not an option.

DETERMINATION

Leaders who care lead by example. They show their people that success requires resolve, and nothing worth achieving comes easily. Leaders who persevere inspire the passion in their people to do the same. It shows the staff that the leader is serious about making commitments and staying the course. That demonstrates the importance of decisions and the worth of the goal. They support long-term improvements and reject quick fixes. Leaders who don't give up when things get tough make a lasting impression on their people. That impression grows when they understand the struggles their people have, and help them with the needed resources.

Workers respond to this with a determination generated from within. They take ownership as they are empowered to act and resolve. People adopt a willingness to change and improve, individually and collectively. They reject short cuts. This drives a can-do culture. They care about contributing to lasting value because they learn that good enough never provides that value.

Caring about excellence is everything. Leaders can transform their organizations and reach potential never imagined if they put their immediate needs aside and care for their people and the outcomes of their endeavors. Their caring becomes contagious.

For more information about how we can aid your transformation from "good-enough" to great using our **LeaderShift Architect** services, feel free to contact me personally to set up a consultation.

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