



Procurement Career Mentor Clinic – Dealing with Inept Leadership

PETER SMITH - June 7, 2016 12:22 AM |

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One of the many challenges Procurement & Supply Chain people struggle with is mastering how to grow their careers successfully. This article is one of a number of planned 'clinics' to help supply management folks by addressing specific questions we've

been asked on the career/work theme.

Readers are encouraged to send questions to Spend Matters [psmith\[at\]spendmatters.com](mailto:psmith@spendmatters.com) or write to Sigi Osagie directly at [sigi.osagie\[at\]epgsolutions.co.uk](mailto:sigi.osagie@epgsolutions.co.uk) www.sigiosagie.com. We will pick out the most relevant ones and address them in further articles.

MARTIN S. ASKS: What if your leadership has no idea what they're doing, has zero procurement experience and knowledge and no plans?

(Martin contacted me in response to a tweet from [Procurement Mojo](#).)

Although it's not often publicised, this is a debilitating challenge for many people. In the worst cases, working for a leader who is seemingly clueless can make you feel like jumping out of a 10th floor window and slitting your throat on the way down. In less severe cases, where your boss hasn't engaged and inspired the team it can still be demoralising. Either way, working for an incompetent or ineffective boss can become a source of stress.

People sometimes undervalue the vital importance of effective leadership in the workplace. Yet leadership is the glue that holds it all together. That's why the best organisations invest significantly in their leadership bench strength and ensure incumbent leaders embody leadership styles that get the best from their people. Managers at all levels are the critical conduits to nourishing the psychological contract between employees and the organisation.

Unfortunately, Martin, we don't all work for top-notch organisations, and we sometimes end up working for **Procurement leaders we have no faith in**. It can be a multifaceted issue, so let's focus on some of the most important elements, particularly those within your control.

Firstly, are you referring to your Procurement leader specifically or the organisational leadership collectively?

If it's the latter, then it may be that you're in the wrong environment. You can't change the entire leadership capability in your organisation. So don't drive yourself insane by trying. Life is too short to spend a huge chunk of it in **toxic organisational environments**. You should find a job in an organisation whose values and ethos align with yours. (Of course, you must know what your own values are.)

If it's your Procurement leader specifically, my guidance is to retain focus on your effectiveness and job success; that means doing the right things right.

Challenge your thinking and perspectives by validating that **you are going about your own obligations effectively**. This may include how you communicate with your boss; and, indeed, if and how you provide feedback to him/her on pertinent work issues, including his/her leadership approach. You should be doing this assertively (*NOTE: assertiveness does not equal aggressiveness!*)

You should also validate your perceptions by observing your boss in a structured way for a few days or weeks. Try to identify specific examples of what s/he does right and wrong, and the positive or negative aspects of his/her leadership approach. At the same time, see if you can identify your boss's motivational drivers. This is an invaluable aid to understanding him/her better and learning to 'manage your manager' more effectively.

If you have trusted colleagues in the team, you may tactfully check your perceptions with their opinions to confirm your views.

Irrespective of your viewpoint and feelings, it may be valuable to have an honest one-to-one dialogue with your boss. You should approach this with candour, tact and assertiveness. Your earlier structured observations may come in useful to exemplify points you raise in the discussion. It'd be prudent to take notes at this meeting. And remember that listening to him/her empathetically is as important as stating your case.

Listening is a cornerstone of understanding others. Listening to yourself – your inner voice, what you say and how you say it – also helps you grow your self-awareness and cultivate a mindset that'll help you deal with such challenges. It's important to maintain the right frame of mind to navigate through these sorts of workplace issues.

Your mindset or outlook may help you recognise that, as challenging as it may be, dealing with an inept boss is also an opportunity to learn and grow. **We only grow when we stretch beyond what we can do already**. Stretching your capabilities to deal with your boss effectively will help you learn how to handle other similar challenges in your future career.

Seeing the situation as a growth opportunity is helpful even if you opt to leave the organisation. Deciding to leave may make you feel justified to make a formal complaint to your HR department. Nonetheless, I'd caution that making a formal complaint should be your last resort – when you feel you've exhausted all other avenues.

One avenue to consider is talking things over confidentially with an experienced and trustworthy senior manager in your organisation. Another is changing jobs and moving to a different area of the organisation, if possible. Again, it's important to have clarity of your long-term aspirations so that such a move is still in line with your career goals.

Keeping your focus on your job/career success and your personal effectiveness is crucial. Ultimately, whatever tactics help address the issue, you owe it to yourself to [take responsibility for shaping your immediate job context and career destiny](#) such that you can thrive and shine. Don't let YOUR destiny be held to ransom by inept leadership.

