



The Advisory Alliance 60-Second Email™

Do Your Leader Vacuums Need a Cleaning? ***August 31, 2009***

In this month's 60-Second Email™, we abhor vacuuming.

“Nature abhors a vacuum.” The quote is often attributed to Aristotle, the Greek philosopher (and student of Plato and teacher of Alexander the Great) who lived from 384 to 322 BC. The quote has nothing to do with your carpets or your Hoover, Electrolux, or Dyson. Aristotle was talking about voids in space, places that are empty of matter, empty of “stuff”. Aristotle felt that true perfect vacuums, or voids, were antithetical to Nature’s essence.

Aristotle aside, our everyday experience does bring us into contact with vacuums, although of the less “perfect” kind than Aristotle had in mind. If you’ve ever opened a tin or a sealed jar, you’ve heard the “whoosh” sound of the seal being broken, the vacuum’s being exposed, and air rushing in to fill the (partial) void.

In a less literal way, if you’ve ever lived in an organization that has been starved for information, where free-flowing communication has been sucked out of it, you know that people also abhor a vacuum, in this case, an information vacuum. Paradoxically, leaders who prefer not to be forthright with information or who, for whatever reason, don’t go out of their way to ensure that their associates know what’s what with the firm, its business, its customers, etc., often find themselves having to deal with rumors and falsehoods that are worse than the reality.

To paraphrase Aristotle, people in organizations abhor an information vacuum (particularly during times of uncertainty...although that’s being redundant). If employees can’t elicit the information they seek from their leaders, they will invent it. That is, they will do as best they can with what information they do have to piece together the best approximation possible, all the while being influenced by and subject to the attendant anxiety, confusion, and suspicion that accompany times of heightened stress.



The Advisory Alliance 60-Second Email™

So to fast forward a couple of millennia from Aristotle's time, we find ourselves, possibly at the bottom of a long and painful economic decline. Organizations have been upended, right-sized, re-organized, and optimized. Those employees left standing are now beginning to ask, "So where to from here?"

If your firm has weathered the storm and the attendant financial tsunami, what's the course now? Where to from here? Many of your people, who were asked to hold on, have held on. Now they probably want to know what the game plan is for growth, for moving forward, for securing their and the organization's future.

And so you ask yourself: "As a leader, how much do I abhor the vacuum?"

You can access all of our 60-Second Emails (TM), including our most recent issue, "How Big is Your Blind Spot?" via this link: <http://www.advisoryalliance.com/newsletter.php>

Have a comment on the information vacuums you've come across? Share your thoughts with our readers on our blog: <http://www.advisoryalliance.com/blog>

Best regards,

David

David Harper, Managing Principal
dharper@advisoryalliance.com

The Advisory Alliance advises and works with Fortune 500 & Mid-Market companies to build their next generation of leaders and managers.

Talent. Leadership. Performance.SM
www.AdvisoryAlliance.com

© 2009 The Advisory Alliance, LLC. All Rights Reserved.