



## Teabag Leadership

*Great leaders are like teabags -- you never know how strong they are until they're in hot water!*

*By Nancy L. Clark*

There seems to be a lot of talk these days about teabags and teabag parties. I, however, propose we start a different movement - a teabag leadership movement. Nothing political, instead the purpose will be just to focus upon improving leadership overall (not that both the Democrats and the Republicans couldn't greatly benefit from such an effort).

So why teabags? Well, the true test of a leader is how well s/he performs in hot water. And, right now there is an abundance of opportunities to be in hot water. Whether it's the economy, engineering flaws, accounting errors, whatever, most public and private leaders feel some degree of heat. Some handle hot water well, many don't.

If it weren't so tragic, it would almost be comical--the daily breaking news of another leader getting into hot water. All too often these same leaders promote a squeaky clean image, advance guiding values, and/or hypocritically scorn others. The questions many of us have: Why don't they handle the situation ethically rather than try to bury it? Do they really think they will get away with it? Whatever "it" is.

No one was tested harder than James Burke. As Chairman of Johnson & Johnson in the 1980s, Burke was at the helm when the Tylenol tampering case exploded onto the scene. Someone tampered with the product which resulted in 7 deaths in the Chicago area. Burke did not try and hide the problem or ignore it. He immediately formed a task force with only two goals: 1.) Protect people and, 2.) If possible, save the brand. He had guiding values and he stayed true to them even in boiling water. He distributed warnings to hospitals and distributors, halted Tylenol production and advertising, issued a nationwide recall of Tylenol products and advertised not to consume any products that contained Tylenol. And this all happened within just a few days.

Studying James Burke as well as other industry and political leaders, there are things we can learn:

- Be clear and articulate about what your values are and are not. Test yourself and create scenarios to determine how you will/will not respond in a crisis. If you throw a value overboard in times of crisis, then it is not a value. (Values are not just employed when convenient.)
- Work with your Board (or boss) to prepare them for a crisis beforehand. Helping them think through and plan in advance will help you remain true to your values.
- Tear down all the signs that "advertise" values; instead model and make sure that the values are integrated into your operations and are rewarded. These signs just promote cynicism among your employees if they aren't truly embraced.
- Conduct anonymous customer and employee surveys to understand how they are/are not applying on the front lines. Regularly reflect and evaluate with your leadership team on how well the organization is staying true to the values. Make corrections as needed.

None of this is rocket science, but it does seem to get lost in the current rush of business. James Burke did the right thing; and, yes, he saw his market share plummet. However, by the end of that year, Tylenol's market share rebounded and consumer confidence was restored. Burke proved his "teabag" was very strong in the hottest of water.

Join the "Teabag Leadership Movement" -- be strong and unite!

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