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One of the most frustrating things a professional can experience is having to follow an ineffective leader. There are some leaders who are insecure--afraid of being outshone, afraid of looking bad, or afraid to make a decision. Some are visionless, failing to provide direction or incentive to move forward. Others are incompetent, unable to grasp a fundamental understanding of their role. Some can be selfish, advancing at the expense of everyone else. Some have a tendency to be inconsistent in their emotions--whose reactions are always unpredictable. Some strive to always be political--whose main desire is personally getting ahead rather than taking care of the mission or people. And some are controlling--who have to be in the middle of everything, micromanaging everything you do.

It would be much easier for everyone if ineffective leaders were fixed or replaced but unfortunately, in most places, that's ruled out as an option due to political or legal reasons. Nonetheless, here's what you can do to cope with, survive, or even flourish if you're stuck in a situation impacted by ineffective leadership:

1. *Develop a solid relationship with your leader.* The first reaction you are tempted with when working for an ineffective leader is to withdraw from him or her and build relational barriers. Fight that urge. If you make your leader your adversary, you will create a no-win situation. Instead, build a relational bridge. Get to know your boss, find some common ground, and build a solid professional relationship. Perhaps you both root for the same professional sports team, or you both enjoy the same recreational activity. Take some

moments to talk about those similarities.

2. *Identify and appreciate your leader's strengths.* Everybody has strengths--even an ineffective leader. Work to find them in the person you work for. It probably won't be easy because maybe their strengths aren't qualities you admire or value, but don't let that matter. Find their strengths and think about how they might be assets to the organization. If your boss is intimidating when making a point, perhaps he or she would do well for the organization during a specific and tough negotiation with another company.

3. *Commit yourself to adding value to your leader's strengths.* Leverage his or her strengths to help the organization. If your boss is a hard-nosed negotiator, suggest that they attend an elite, world class negotiation course to add vital tools to their tool box, making them the organization's premier negotiator. Then help find opportunities where their negotiation skills can be put to good use.

4. *Get permission to develop a game plan to complement your leader's weaknesses.* Any good leader knows it is wise to empower people who can fill in their talent gaps. For instance, if a leader isn't good with details, it would be a good idea to hire someone who is and have that person work closely with them. In your boss's case, maybe you can perform a particular gap-filling role.

(Note: When approaching your boss on a matter like this, don't tell him or her they have a weakness--just offer to help in the area of weakness you perceive them to have. If they ever identify one of their weaknesses to others, ask them, in a private setting, if they would be willing to let you carry the ball in that area. The idea is to do what they can't do so that they can do what they do best.)

5. *Expose your leader to good leadership resources.* Read books, watch videos, and/or listen to live or recorded audio and then let your boss know how much you learned. Perhaps you can share a book, video, or audio source with them. (Never tell them they need it! Rather, approach it in the same manner you would as if you were telling them about an awesome movie you recently saw.)

6. *Publicly affirm your leader.* Some people fear that if they say positive things about an ineffective leader they work for, that others will accuse them of being misleading, being a kiss-up, or having poor judgment. But if you think about it, in most instances, other people are typically or already aware of an ineffective leader's limitations, so as long as your affirmation is truthful and focuses on your leader's strengths, it won't reflect poorly on you. In fact, it will engender others' respect for you because you're shining a positive light on people and the organization despite any shadows lingering in the hallways.

There is little downside to adding value to your leader and the organization. In doing so you are adding value to yourself as well. People (especially top-level leaders) will notice your efforts and begin recognizing your talent. They will admire your ability to succeed and your commitment to helping others.

Never allow yourself to give in to the frustration you feel when working for an ineffective leader. Either be the ingredient that makes the recipe great or be the chef who turns the recipe into a great meal. Either way, you can make a significant difference despite anyone or anything. And before long, *you* will be the *effective* leader that others follow!

~ The End ~