

No-Drama Leadership

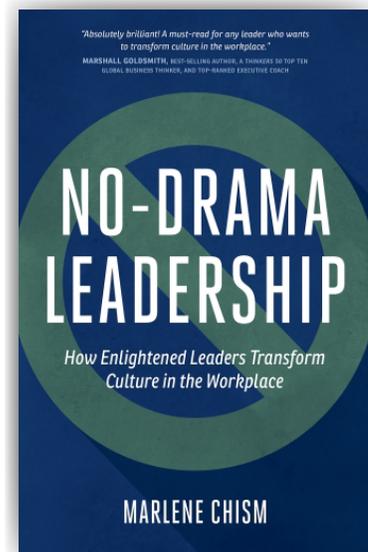
How Enlightened Leaders Transform Culture in the Workplace

Marlene Chism

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KEY CONCEPTS

- Supervisors and managers are often the cause of poor employee performance, absenteeism, and turnover. In many cases, they are promoted into positions of responsibility without any leadership training.
- Leaders must align their companies' values with their own. Without alignment, they will lack awareness and accountability for the people they manage.
- Self-awareness is a start, but leaders must also be aware of other people and cultures.
- Responsible leaders take ownership of situations and are accountable for doing what is required.
- Decisions are frequently made by leaders without regard for how they may impact others. Good leaders see both the short- and long-term impacts of their decisions.
- Communication is important to any technical training a company may require. Without good communication skills, drama can result both inside and outside the company.
- When employees have some control over, or at least an understanding of, the changes happening within their work environments, they are less inclined to resist them.
- Enlightened leaders address issues immediately and correct course as needed, rather than hoping problems will simply go away.
- Leaders must put time and effort into understanding their employees to ensure engagement happens in a positive way.

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

A lack of leadership results in problematic work behaviors, such as poor performance and absenteeism. Unless supervisors take responsibility for good workplace relationships, their companies' cultures will suffer. The problems start when employees are promoted to leadership positions without the necessary skills and training, which can lead to workplace drama. In **No-Drama Leadership**, Marlene Chism presents a new model where everyone is a leader—from frontline employees to CEOs. This encourages people at all levels to learn from one another and become more aligned, aware, and accountable.

PART 1: THE WILL TO BE

If leaders are not willing to take action and responsibility, their leadership training will not have reliable long-term impacts. There will be no forward movement or improvement without willingness. For leadership training to be successful, leaders must have both the desire to change and the willingness to do whatever needs to be done.

Aligned

Many leaders focus on either people or profits, and do not realize the two need to be aligned. Alignment is also needed between the things people say and the ways their companies operate. If a company's operation does not align with what it claims to value, the business will not seem authentic. Good leaders learn quickly from their mistakes when they are out of alignment, understanding that if they are not aligned in one area, other areas will suffer.

Misalignment occurs when leaders are unaware, are not held accountable, or have competing values. A good example of an organization that has fallen out of alignment is the National Football League (NFL), which has been in the spotlight for the domestic violence acts committed by several of their players. If fans ignore these issues and value hero worship above all else, nothing will change. Although the NFL may have policies about the character standards of their players, their behaviors must match their corporate values in order to be in alignment.

Words are not enough—leaders must demonstrate commitment to alignment through their actions. When an organization only cares about the status quo, problems will continue to emerge and taint its public image. Until problems are acknowledged and addressed publicly, nothing will change.

Leaders are responsible for aligning their organizations' visions, missions, and values. At times, they may need help from a third party who can see things with a fresh perspective. At the very least, they need to verbalize their discomfort.

Aware

When morale is low, employees make mistakes and there is a high level of absenteeism. Enlightened leaders are those who recognize these problems and identify how they might have contributed to them. If leaders are entirely focused on profit, they are more likely to overlook negative employee behaviors.

Awareness is built on values and is needed to ensure a business goes in the right direction. People build awareness when they pay attention to their own thoughts, observe internal politics, and learn to read others' body

Leaders lose perspective and balance when their personal values clash with those of the organization they work for, causing cognitive dissonance and forcing them to choose between two equally important values.

language. As leaders identify others' values and become more transparent about their own, they no longer send out conflicting messages to clients, customers, and employees.

Self-awareness results in growth and enables leaders to manage their emotions. As a result, they take responsibility for their thoughts, words, and actions, which, in turn, positively affects their work environments. As their

Alignment is first, accountability second. In other words, you may be able to reach a goal at any cost, but when you move toward a goal while maintaining alignment with your values, winning is more narrowly defined.

other-awareness develops, leaders also learn to sincerely listen and see the possibilities in other people.

Cultural awareness is another step in this process, and it occurs when leaders understand the politics of their workplaces. Without this knowledge, they make poor decisions and develop communication issues. Leaders who lack awareness of themselves, others, and other cultures will see signs of drama within their companies. However, with clarity and awareness, change *can* happen. When people become more aware, they can be clear about what they want.

Accountable

A lack of responsibility results in a lack of accountability because people do not take ownership of their actions. This occurs when leaders avoid employee problems or gossip about them rather than demonstrate responsibility for the people they lead. Sometimes leaders do not have the skills to deal with problematic behaviors, and other times they simply choose not to because

investing in people is not their top priority. If they default to a mind-set of blaming others rather than one of responsibility, they are not able to produce accountable cultures. Instead, they need to take ownership and perform the actions to back up their claims.

Responsible leaders create cultures that align with their organizations' business values and make decisions based on those values. Once they decide to be responsible, they can use accountability to stay on track. Unfortunately, many shy away from accountability because it sounds like a threat when "someone is being held accountable."

In Carol Dweck's book *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, she discusses growth mind-sets versus fixed mind-sets and how they relate to accountability. People with *growth mind-sets* believe in their capacity to change, while those with *fixed mind-sets* believe things will always stay as they are. A fixed mind-set with a focus on profits can often result in drama, but a willingness to see the capacity for change results in growth. Leaders with growth mind-sets often excel in the areas of alignment, awareness, and accountability, leading to positive changes and drama-free workplaces.

PART 2: THE EYES TO SEE

Decisions are frequently made by leaders without regard for how they may impact others. The best leaders can see both the short- and long-term impacts of their decisions.

Communication

When leaders have critical news for employees and do not communicate it well, negativity and dissatisfaction often result. Leaders need to consider the impacts of their decisions on their organizations' overall operations, remembering that profits and people are equally important.

Unfortunately, many businesses invest in technical training to improve profits and overlook the soft skill of communication, which is used in all areas of business. It is difficult for people to communicate well without a strong understanding of themselves and others. Communication skills cannot simply be learned in a short training class; instead commitment, practice, and a focus on building strong relationships are required.

In order to be successful leaders, individuals must genuinely listen to others and demonstrate sincere interest in what they are saying. Great leaders also view everyone in their organizations as being of equal value. Communication happens every day internally with employees and externally with clients and vendors, so this is a skillset that cannot be ignored. With great communication skills, leaders develop more collaborative environments where people are aligned, aware, and accountable.

Strategic communication includes not making assumptions about others and understanding their points of view. When this does not happen, it results in workplace drama. Enlightened leaders seek the best interests of their employees and demonstrate this by listening and asking questions before presenting their own agendas. Communication is about finding common ground rather than winning.

Change

While many people assume that others do not want to change, the fact is that many are willing to change as long as they have a role in it or at least see the opportunities for growth. When people resist change, it is because it is forced on them or it is not a type of change they believe to be beneficial. All change brings opportunities for growth, and there are four quadrants that change can fall into:

Know this: lack of clarity is always going to cause drama, especially when it comes to improving employee performance.

1. *Expected and wanted change:* When life goes as planned. The challenge here is to see how change impacts other stakeholders, recognizing that desired change in one area can result in the opposite in other areas.
2. *Unexpected but wanted change:* An unexpected, but greatly desired, promotion at work. The challenge here is similar to that of the first quadrant, where recipients of change need to be aware of how others are impacted.
3. *Expected but unwanted change:* People waiting for bad news.
4. *Unexpected and unwanted change:* Sudden changes in the economy, weather, or some other unknown. Leaders must learn to communicate more frequently and be open to learning new methods of change management.

Both the second and fourth quadrants are based on uncertainty, which can bring anxiety even when the change is wanted. People want to know and be in control of their circumstances. When an organization has a clear mission, vision, and values, people feel more in control. Job descriptions and company policies can help reduce feelings of uncertainty.

All change can result in some resistance, which can also slow progress. People become accustomed to the way they feel things *should* be. They act like victims and react poorly when leaders are not willing to address change and show them they still have choices. When this happens, leaders can help employees see that choices are always available, which also promotes accountability.

Leaders must help their employees work through change by coaching rather than telling them what to do. When people feel they do not have choices, they become conflicted. Unwanted advice results in resistance, while coaching results in awareness. When people are told what to do, they do not feel they have any ownership of the process.

Course Correction

Although it can be difficult to admit defeat, enlightened leaders understand that course correcting ultimately increases productivity. There are three barriers to course correction:

1. *Inconvenience*: Timing, money, and personal feelings are all used as reasons to not correct course. People will often put it off and justify their decisions based on one of these factors.
2. *Attachment*: If leaders are too attached to reaching certain numbers or stated goals, they resist course correction. They are not willing to adjust their plans because they are too committed to their original ideas. Oftentimes, original plans become more important than alignment.
3. *Emotional resistance*: Not wanting to deal with feelings is another barrier. Leaders do not want to feel vulnerable and be transparent about mistakes. Course correction can often feel like a failure with this mind-set.

Course correction does not have to be a major event if it is part of an organization's overall culture. When minor corrections happen over time, they are hardly noticed. Instead, it becomes a problem when the desire for a goal supersedes the desire to stay in alignment. When there is a narrow focus on a goal, leaders will avoid course correction. They allow minor errors and take action to cover up mistakes, rather than addressing problems early on. When this happens, minor errors can ultimately turn into front-page news.

The steps leaders take to course correct—or avoid it—are felt throughout their entire organizations and impact their corporate cultures. This does not only happen at the highest levels: First-line supervisors can have as much of an impact as a CEO, which means leaders at all levels need to learn this important skill.

A growth mind-set and a commitment to ongoing leadership development contribute to a culture in which the ability to course-correct swiftly is seen as a competitive advantage, thus increasing productivity and protecting the company from significant risk.

PART 3: THE POWER TO CREATE

By creating better corporate environments, employees will become more engaged in their work and develop the desire to be creative. Success is about more than just profits; it also includes developing the skills and abilities of employees and recognizing them as unique individuals.

Environment

Culture is about the rules that guide behavior and is often overlooked in the bigger picture. Leaders make decisions that look good on paper without consideration for how they will work in their particular environments. They need to consider their existing cultures first before implementing change.

An organization's *internal environment* refers to the place where employees work together to provide a product or service, and it is the place where leaders have the ability to implement change. Much of culture is defined by employees as "the way things are always done" and is based on assumptions.

An organization's *external environment* includes customers, vendors, and competitors. Understanding how these factors work together is crucial for leaders, as they can choose to see shifts in internal and external cultures as either problems or opportunities.

Engagement

Employee engagement may be based on negative actions rather than positive ones; however, once they define their purposes, employees are more inclined to engage in positive actions that benefit their companies.

Positive engagement is not something that can be simply crossed off a checklist. It takes time to build strong relationships with employees, as they need to see concretely how positive engagement can benefit them. The first step in accomplishing this is for leaders to understand what motivates their employees. Assuming employees make enough money to meet their basic needs, the main motivators then become autonomy, mastery, and purpose. Leaders who are aware of these motivators and create environments where employees can excel will

see an increase in positive engagement. This results in an engaged workforce that seeks to become involved in the greater good rather than only collecting a paycheck.

Leaders need to take initiative in this process since employees are not inclined to speak up about what they need to become more positively engaged. In many cases they either think their workplace cultures seem to discourage engagement or the environments they grew up in were not supportive of engagement.

Leaders must also carefully observe what employees are both excited about and what they complain about. Excitement is a natural result when employees have the freedom to be creative rather than simply solve problems all day. Complaints can be a good thing, too, because they indicate an area that employees care about, and enlightened leaders recognize this as an opportunity for growth. Leaders are responsible for moving people forward from complaints to excitement by validating their ideas and providing positive feedback when their ideas make a difference.

Empowerment

Empowered cultures are ones where employees start to see themselves differently. They no longer work solely to receive a paycheck; instead, they see how their roles have an impact on their companies' success. Empowered cultures result from managers who develop their leadership skills and value their employees. They recognize the contributions of their employees and provide them with the resources to do their jobs effectively. When things do not go well in their businesses, they engage employees to find solutions rather than pointing fingers and blaming others.

Conclusion: From Drama to Enlightenment

Enlightened leaders make changes within themselves first before implementing company-wide changes. There can still be drama during the change process, but this process often results in empowered employees and leaders who are more engaged. When leaders are in alignment, aware, and accountable, they are much more likely to find opportunities for growth.

FEATURES OF THE BOOK

Estimated Reading Time: 4–5 hours, 224 pages

No-Drama Leadership by Marlene Chism is intended to teach leaders how to understand varying viewpoints across their organizations. It is a guide to help people learn how to work together for the greater good of their businesses and improve their corporate cultures. Each chapter ends with an executive summary that highlights the major points and offers exercises for readers to apply the principles. The book should be read in chapter order.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Marlene Chism is a consultant, international speaker, and the author of *Stop Workplace Drama: Train Your Team to Have No Complaints, No Excuses, and No Regrets*. Chism's passion is developing wise leaders and helping people to discover, develop, and deliver their gifts to the world. As an accomplished professional speaker with an international audience, Chism is a dynamic storyteller with the ability to make the complex simple, engaging diverse audiences from corporate executives to entrepreneurs to frontline employees. She has a communications degree from Drury University and a master's degree from Webster University.

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