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Have you gone over to the "Dark Side"?

By Paperitalo Staff

Of course, the "Dark Side" is a popular reference to the Star Wars movie series.

The reaction this column receives when certain topics are discussed is interesting. For instance, last week the "Slovenly Bureaucrat" feature cited a study from America On Line. One reader immediately jumped on this as an invalid study with a statement loosely implying that obviously only slovenly bureaucrats subscribe to America On Line. Perhaps you AOL subscribers would like to refute that? The point is, your writer sometimes brings up a topic and some readers prefer to attack the source data rather than ponder the overall premise. We all do this--I am particularly guilty of it when I read environmental pronouncements. Yet, in all cases there is often a bit of truth we can glean.

Now, some of us who think we are fully productive workers (and, of course we are not, a trained unbiased observer can find faults with many of the activities each and every one of us do, your author included) seem to have started using a code to whisper about our fellow workers who have "gone over to the dark side." In case you are not in on this, I thought it might be worthwhile to share some of the ideas I have heard on this from those haughty, superior types. So, keeping in mind the first full paragraph above, see if you can find any nuggets of truth in the following statements. Those who have "gone over to the dark side" display one or more of the following attributes:

1. Totally focused on themselves, more opportunistic than professional.
2. If they are a manager, spend all their time either: (a) currying favor with the boss or (b) trying to win a popularity contest with their subordinates.
3. Blow with the political winds of the organization.
4. Plan, plan, plan but never execute.
5. Have 50 reasons why they are never responsible for any failure.
6. Never move the organization forward.
7. Have never had an original idea in their life.
8. Think their employer exists to employ them.
9. Will stomp on any co-worker if it moves their career forward.

I could go on, but you get the idea. The point is these are bad things to do, even if you might characterize the source of their verbalization as hypocritical. In fact, acting in these manners are so bad, that following them en masse, as has been done in some entities, has led to complete failure and collapse. Pointedly, if your firm has been on a long downhill slide, look internally--that slide has most assuredly been the result of an excessive number of employees moving to the "Dark Side" and your entity developing a complete "Dark Side" culture.

The failure of any organization or entity, despite what the headlines say, is usually from the inside out, not the other way around. I am not saying that outside conditions do not change, they obviously do, but the failure is one of internal leadership, leadership lacking the perspicacity to see the change coming and then lacking the will or insight to change course. We often laugh about buggy whip manufacturers, and the truth be known, I know of no study examining what actually happened to these companies. But if they had insight, before their resources were depleted, they moved to where markets were moving and transformed themselves. A famous successful case of this is Nokia, of Finland. We think of them as a significant player in cell phones and telephony technology. However, Nokia started as a rubber boot manufacturer and then became a tire manufacturer. If you happen to be standing at the bus stop on Mannerheim Square in Helsinki, you will likely see a bus pull up with Nokia tires. What insight their leadership has had!

You might be a slovenly bureaucrat if--you spend considerable amounts of time searching for someone to take to lunch just so you can expense the meal as business related. We want to thank Russell Williams for this week's contribution.

For safety this week, look at any process flow drawings you may have displayed in operations offices near your unit operations areas. If these are out of date, people may make erroneous operating or lock out decisions based on them. Keep them current to assure safe decisions. We will talk next week. ##