

STRATEGY

AND THE

FAT SMOKER

CHAPTER

Many firms' impressive financial results... **CONTINUE**

BY **DAVID MAISTER**

MANY FIRMS' IMPRESSIVE FINANCIAL RESULTS have been accomplished by consciously creating an environment of fear and insecurity. You can get higher performance out of individuals and organizations by being demanding, terrifying in manner, and (apparently) completely lacking in human sensitivity.

There is, in fact, a time and place for this approach. Consider how you would interact with a child under your supervision who was about to put himself or herself in harm's way.

You can get higher performance out of individuals and organizations by being demanding, terrifying in manner, and (apparently) completely lacking in human sensitivity.

It's not a matter of being unfeeling, but of matching the appropriate temperament and style to the task. Do you need results *now*? Well, this situation is exactly like the baby putting its hand in the fire. This is no time for niceties. And, indeed, this is the best, most effective way to make it happen —once.

The problem with this approach is that if it is used too frequently or even continuously, it begins to feel as if you are living in a world of nonstop, extended battles and wars - otherwise known as business as usual. Over time, it stops working. People become worn out, suffer burnout, and leave.

There is another way. If you (first) energize and excite your people about the work they do (and the clients they do it for), they will serve your clients better; in turn, the clients will then (and perhaps only then) give you superior financial rewards.

But you'd only take this approach if you (a) truly wanted to get somewhere in the future, (b) were willing to incur costs today to get there tomorrow, (c) had patience and controlled your need for instant gratification, and (d) were more interested in building something new (a career, a firm, a skill, an achievement) than exploiting what was immediately available.

Some people are not tyrants or energizers, but they are cynics. They ask such questions as:

“Anyway, what’s wrong with people not being turned on? Don’t you need a certain number of people who are cruising (and *not* trying to go somewhere) in order to take care of the repetitive work that always needs to be done? Can’t we just pay them less?”

“The people writing books say we will make more money if we require everyone to learn and grow. But *can* everyone learn and grow, or even become excited? Do we *want* them all to be ambitious, dynamic? Don’t we make money off employees who will just do their job and not expect too much of the rest of us?”

The cynics create their own problems. Their limited, pragmatic focus elicits precisely the same reaction from those they manage.

The cynics create their own problems. Their limited, pragmatic focus elicits precisely the same reaction from those they manage. If management doesn’t really care about excitement, excellence, and the mission, then why should they?

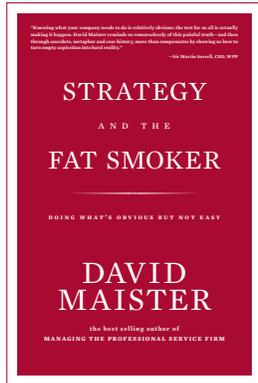
Managers who have these “yes, but” attitudes send off very clear signals to those they manage. Even if they are never actually said out loud, these thought processes are immediately obvious in managers who think this way. And if your people think that you have attitudes reflected in the above statements, how do you think they are going to respond? Will you truly be able to achieve the excellence goals you say you want to aim for?

Cynics and skeptics in managerial positions are more dangerous even than the abusers. Through their cynicism they allow the abusers to be tolerated!

Cynics and skeptics in managerial positions are more dangerous even than the abusers. Through their cynicism they allow the abusers to be tolerated!

Let's be honest. It's not just “those guys” at the top thinking and acting this way. It's everybody. All of us, you and I included. Of course, it's always easier to identify it in the other person.

INFO



BUY THE BOOK

Click here to get more details or buy a copy of David Maister's *Strategy and the Fat Smoker*.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Maister is widely acknowledged as one of the world's leading authorities on the management of professional service firms. For two decades he has acted as a consultant to prominent professional firms around the world, on a wide variety of strategic and managerial issues. In 2002, he was named as one of the top 40 business thinkers in the world (Business Minds, by Tom Brown, PrenticeHall/Financial Times). He is the author of the bestselling books *Managing the Professional Service Firm* (1993), *True Professionalism* (1997), *The Trusted Advisor* (2000), *Practice What You Preach* (2001) and *First Among Equals* (2002). These books have been translated into 14 languages. For seven years, he served as a professor on the faculty of the Harvard Business School (1979-85), prior to launching his consulting practice. He lives in Boston, Massachusetts.

In March of 2005, he finally took his own advice, gave up smoking and lost 30 pounds.

Visit his website at www.davidmaister.com.

DOWNLOAD THIS AND OTHER CHAPTERS OF THE BOOK

This PDF is part of an ongoing podcast series that explores David Maister's new book, *Strategy and the Fat Smoker*. Subscribe to the podcast using iTunes, or visit the subscription area on his website, www.davidmaister.com/subscriptions.

COPYRIGHT INFO

The copyright in this work belongs to the author, who is solely responsible for the content. Please direct content feedback or permissions questions to the author at david@davidmaister.com.