

Corporations and Whackamole

What's a Coach to Do?

By Charles E. Smith Ph.D

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Joseph Heller wrote in his novel, *Good as Gold*: "The most advanced and penultimate stage of civilization is attained when chaos masquerades as order."

I'm pretty sure we've already arrived.

I recently worked inside a major corporation for the ten thousandth time as visitor, consultant, friend, confidant and teacher. This always starts well and I almost always sell more coaching because people sincerely want more of the initial experience of creativity, freedom and possibility. I was physically inside a system more than usual and had a blinding insight. Every day, I noticed that whatever was going on, there were frequent, surprising, dramatic interruptions and each time all order disappeared.

I asked myself: "what is really going on....it never stops....it never stops... "

A voice in my head popped up and said...." It's just like ChuckE Cheese and Whackamole. ChuckE Cheese is a children's pizza and video game place, I visited with my daughters when they were small. It was my first experience with Whackamole, a game I came to love and hate at the same time. Small plastic moles pop up out of a flat surface and your job is to whack them back into the hole with a wooden club. Soon, several pop up at the same time, and as fast as you go, you can never hit them all back down at the same time. Then, the game ends and for another ticket you can start again. After a year, I stopped playing the game. I didn't want to play a game I couldn't win.

Corporations in their advertising and public relations present an ordered world of organization, measurement, results, products, and results. They offer an image of effective performance and logical decision making unlike the images they create of government or non profits which don't have the profit motive to bring order out of chaos.

Now, after forty three years visiting corporations, I see that the corporate world pretends to be reasonable but is really Whackamole in disguise. It is Joseph Heller's "Chaos Masquerading as Order in some advanced and penultimate stage of civilization." At the same time people are rewarded for acting like they are sane and suppressed or punished for acting like they are playing Whackamole.

Recent Moles to Whack included....

Discussions based on Illogical arguments or personal fears

Actions to avoid hierarchical response
Cancellations
Surprise criticism from bosses
New government regulations
Conversations about other people especially about their flaws
Requests to cut costs
Resignations
Uncooperative departments sabotaging each other
Endless explanations about why something didn't work
Complaints
Missed deadlines
Thwarted intentions
Undelivered communications
Failed expectations
Secrets
Requests from 4000 miles away for compliance to unnecessary requests

If, in fact, we live in corporations where chaos masquerades as order, then what is winning? Is this some silly purgatory to which we sentence ourselves? Is it even possible to fix it or get out?

I think, in jest, that the only way to win is not to play or to become a coach.

One morning this week, my client (in the American Midwest) and I walked toward a beautifully designed office building for an intensive counseling session both personal and business. On the grass was a Canadian Goose sitting on her eggs. In the middle of the path, a large male goose stood vigilant and fiercely guarding eggs and the prospective mother. We walked slowly to the side but the goose came at us in a decisive and threatening way.

We kept going and the goose reached for my colleague and bit her pocketbook. We retreated and walked around the building. We both felt like cowards and something wrong had just happened.

That afternoon on the way to lunch, the goose was waiting for us. We approached gingerly and stayed again to the side of the path. The goose came toward me fast and threatening. In the moment and without thinking, I attacked the goose swinging my briefcase with extreme force and roaring at the same time. The goose hesitated and retreated. We walked to the car and went to lunch.

We were victorious and without cowardly thought. We won and both felt great. There was no one to please, no authority to comply with. When it was over, it was over. The goose did what it was supposed to do and I did what I was supposed to. All was well with the world.

Then, we went back to our game of Corporate Whackamole..

n.b. Apologies for picking on corporations only. The argument extends to politics, government, communities and a lot of marriages.

Charles E Smith P.H.D
Kairos Productions Inc.
803 Buena Vista Drive
Eustis, Florida 32726