

# **Bureaucracy, Sludge and Human Energy**

**By Charlie Smith**

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Unbridled bureaucracy turns human energy into sludge.

No matter how well intentioned or useful, bureaucracy comes with rules, monitoring and arbitrary authority that encourages people to think only what they are paid to think. Some become thoughtless agents that turn the company into a machine instead of doing the right thing at the right time.

People, like horses, perform much better if they are willing partners rather than obedient participants. Monty Robert's is the Horse Whisperer. At the heart of his gentle, effective method is the belief that with "trust", a horse will trust you, and that with listening, you spark motivation. Roberts says, "For centuries, humans have said to horses, 'You do what I tell you or I'll hurt you.' Humans still say that to each other - still threaten, force and intimidate. .... Robert's is saying that no one else has the right to say 'you must' to an animal - or to another human."

Perhaps, that's why no one writes poems or love songs about corporations or agencies.

## **A Parable**

Imagine that you are a cat and you are a middle manager in a big company.

"The cat (you) is placed in a box, together with a radioactive atom. If the atom decays, a hammer kills the cat; if the atom doesn't decay, the cat lives. As the atom is considered to be in either state before the observer opens the box, the cat must thus be considered to be simultaneously dead and alive." From Steve Martin based on Edwin Schrodinger's Cat Paradox(1935)

A paradox is a statement that seems contradictory or absurd but in reality expresses a possible truth. For example;

The Catch-22 Paradox. "A situation where someone is in need of something that can only be had by not being in need of it."

The Hofstadter's Law Paradox. "Hofstadter's Law is that everything takes longer than you expect even when you consider Hofstadter's Law."

The Liar Paradox. "This sentence is false."

Most of the people I've met in companies like things one way or another. We live in an either-or mental universe. They avoid the reality of paradox. The fact is that many of our challenges in business and in life are paradoxical.

Having high performance and human caring at the same time is like the wave/particle duality in physics. Under certain circumstances, an electron will behave like a wave. Under different circumstances it will behave like a particle. So is an electron a wave or a particle? It's neither and both. In any moment, is what we really want a matter of high performance or human caring? It is neither and both.

In the same way as particles and waves, human caring and great work are always there and not.

There is no solution to the paradox but are better ways to engage with it.

Over the years, I've had clients whose companies made a lot of money and enabled widespread, positive relationships. The simplest explanation is that in their own attitude and behavior, they personally demonstrated the caring for people and demand for results they wanted to see.

I saw the following as their rules and that was all personally generated. They knew that no process would get them there.

They.....

1. Usually were willing to be coached personally regarding their own future, impact on others, and the ways they thought about the company..
2. Always showed up on time.
3. Kept becoming a more and more effective coach
4. Spent money developing critical people and groups.
5. Often committed themselves to ambitious, unpredictable results.
6. Were sometimes willing to ignore or transcend policy or procedure for the sake of doing the right thing.
7. Were personally vulnerable some of the time.
9. Maintained a positive, trustful attitude.

As Ghandi said..... "Be the Change."