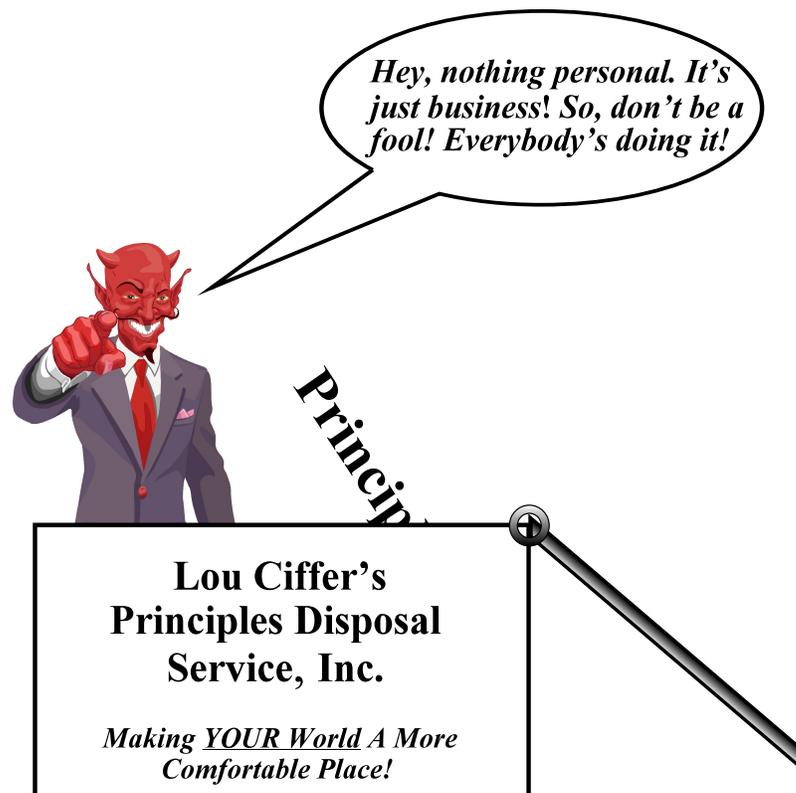


- 11 -

Our Dysfunctional Cultures



■ “AND, THE BEAT GOES ON . . .” ■

“Do not blame Caesar, blame the people of Rome who have so enthusiastically acclaimed and adored him and rejoiced in their loss of freedom and danced in his path and gave him triumphal processions. Blame the people who hail him when he speaks in the Forum of the 'new, wonderful good society' which shall now be Rome, interpreted to mean 'more money, more ease, more security, more living fatly at the expense of the industrious.’”

Marcus Tullius Cicero

This quote just about sums up the lack of vision associated with the dysfunctional side of human nature and the cultures that are created, be they in the group, team, organization, or society as a whole. It also demonstrates how people give their power away to leaders without any forethought regarding the long-term consequences of their short-term actions/agendas. The Roman Empire, like any great civilization, grew, reached its peak, and then began its inevitable decline from within. While there are many factors that contributed to the decline, a loss of values and moral decay from within were certainly at the top of the list. Like Rome and other civilizations that have come and gone, our organizations face a similar life cycle.

There are, and have been, many good organizations that have created strong, positive cultures that enabled them to sustain themselves over time. Unfortunately, these organizations must work extra hard to maintain their effectiveness amidst all of the issues they are confronted with as a result of other dysfunctional groups and/or individuals whose decisions impact them in a negative fashion. Lately, it seems as if these strong, positive organizations are the exception rather than the rule.

Over time, the normative changes in the behavioral parameters in society have created the cultures that exist in our world today. These cultures have evolved through a combination of leadership role modeling and necessity. ***One would think that as educated as we are as a society, we would use our knowledge, experience, and expertise to be the best we can be individually, so that collectively, we would have the intellectual capacity to eradicate many of the problems we face in our organizations and society.*** However, the democracy of human stupidity continues to be our downfall. As Socrates wrote:

“I examined the poets, and I look on them as people whose talent overawes both themselves and others, people who present themselves as wise men and are taken as such, when they are nothing of the sort. From poets, I moved to artists. No one was more ignorant about the arts than I; no one was more convinced that artists possessed really beautiful secrets. However, I noticed that their condition was no better than that of the poets and that both of them have the same misconceptions. Because the most skillful among them excel in their specialty, they look upon themselves as the wisest of men. In my eyes, this presumption completely tarnished their knowledge. As a result, putting myself in the place of the oracle and asking myself what I would prefer to be — what I was or what they were, to know what they have learned or to know that I know nothing — I replied to myself and to the god: I wish to remain who I am.

We do not know — neither the sophists, nor the orators, nor the artists, nor I— what the True, the Good, and the Beautiful are. But there is this difference between us: although these people know nothing, they all believe they know something; whereas, I, if I know nothing, at least have no doubts about it. As a result, all this superiority in wisdom which the oracle has attributed to me reduces itself to the single point that I am strongly convinced that I am ignorant of what I do not know.”

As he observed nearly 2500 years ago, Socrates saw that while people (leaders) pass themselves

off as being knowledgeable and learned, they really know nothing, or are not as competent as they believe themselves to be. In the last 100 years, mankind has progressed like the speed of light compared to the rest of history. And yet, Socrates' observation of the leaders in his day can be applied to the leaders, and followers, of today.

With the behavioral parameters for society continuing to evolve and expand as I outlined Chapter 9, we are edging closer each day to experiencing the same negative outcomes that have befallen the great civilizations of the past. The indifference, self-centeredness, laziness, entitlement mentality, and the focus on power, politics, and especially, profit, are causing people, out of necessity, to seek creative strategies just to *survive* in life. They must also work hard to *belong and gain status* within their groups. It is becoming increasingly harder to walk a path based on truth/principles while those around you keep getting ahead by rationalizing and compromising their values and embracing the Path of Least Resistance. Our culture will determine our destiny and our commitment to application of the NORMATIVE Leadership philosophy in our daily lives, will determine if we can turn things around. Otherwise, we will become another example of a society that did not learn from history.

■ REALITY AND THE NORMATIVE PERSPECTIVE ■

In the last chapter, I mentioned my thoughts regarding everything we were taught being just a big scam. Recently, I had an experience that gave me a more realistic outlook on life and the NORMATIVE Leadership style that I preach. It was one of those moments of wisdom that comes to you through 20/20 hindsight in your “enlightened years.” It was during my semi-annual lunch with a friend whom I have known since grade school. He was a retired corporate executive who had done quite well for himself. After we finished talking about the physical aches and pains we were experiencing in our supposed “golden years” as senior citizens, and the memories from the “good ‘ol days,” the topic changed to current events. (This is a social phenomenon that you might have observed. Retired senior citizens sitting around at a fast food restaurant, “bitching” about everything, presenting their ideas on how “they,” the people in power, should solve the problems of the world. They debate the merits of their ideas, but solve nothing. When the meeting is over, they go back to their individual lives and collect more data for tomorrow’s meeting!) We covered the spectrum from politics, religion, social media, business and government, and the impact that each had on our lives and society as a whole. He noticed that as we bounced from topic to topic that my frustration level increased accordingly. He sat back and just allowed me to vent my frustrations. At the end of my tirade, I said, “*You know what?, it’s all a scam!*” He just smiled and said, “*You finally grew up.*” His statement hit me like a ton of bricks. I sat there momentarily in silence and my life flashed before my eyes. Then, I recalled the words of another friend of mine who was experiencing his frustration with the realities of life. “*Yeah,*” he said, “*you work hard, play by the rules — and get screwed!*”

Growing up Catholic, I heard the message of love, forgiveness and turning the other cheek, and I

believed it. However, whenever I tried to live a principled life as I was taught to do, I got screwed. Whenever it happened, I rationalized that I did the right thing and even though I was taken advantage of, Jesus was proud of me and I would have a great reward in Heaven! This was my operating style and I became an Accommodator to please others — at the expense of myself. I learned the hard way that my style was out of balance and began to take back *my power*.

Remember, as a NORMATIVE Leader, when you “read” *the process* regarding the *here and now* dynamics that occur surrounding an individual and/or a group, you are experiencing “the truth” as it is happening, or has happened in a certain situation. As you have also learned, people can intellectualize, philosophically rationalize, or politically spin their version of the reality of truth. According to my friend and normative colleague, J. Kevin Abraham, whose book, *Agape: What Love Really Is*, I referred to in Chapter 3, *truth is truth*. It is the reality of “what is,” and he contends that as human beings, we all know what truth is — despite our attempts to rationalize or spin it. He presents a simply brilliant scenario to logically prove his premise:

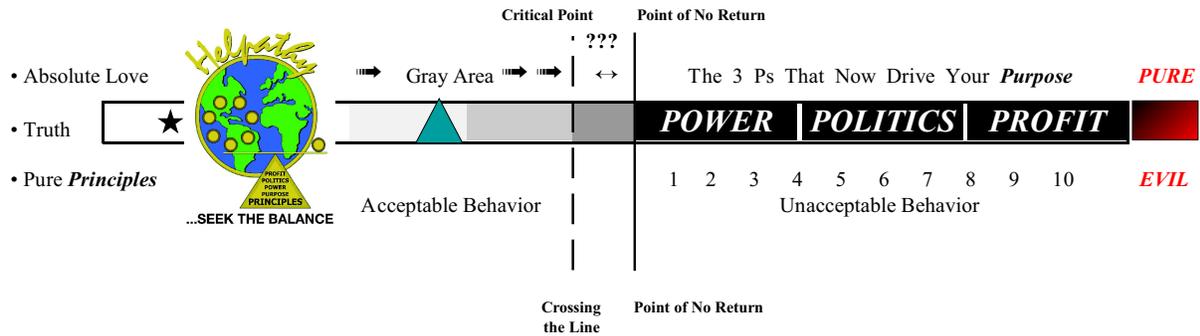
"What is truth," asked the student? "Truth is the accurate and correct perception of reality, and reality, is that which is," replied the master. "Yes," replied the student, "but truth can be subjectively interpreted based on one's beliefs, and this makes it difficult or impossible to really know truth." A slight grin appears on the face of the master and he asks, "Did you ever tell a lie?" "Yes, I have," replied the student. "Then logically," replied the master, "if you told a lie, you knew what the truth was."

You live the culture each day and see the truth regarding the dysfunctional individual and group dynamics that people knowingly reinforce by their actions or condone through their silence by turning a *blind eye*. This perpetuates and accelerates the inevitable erosion of the culture and contributes to the ever-increasing normative gap between what is supposed to happen and what really happens in life. The sad thing is that most “most people” can “read” the symptomatic behaviors that are modeled and hear the gossip and rumors that are circulating about certain individuals and/or events, but choose to do nothing about it. This *choice* delays the inevitable norms crisis that will eventually occur when the truth of what is really happening finally surfaces. And, when it does, everybody then scrambles in *survival mode* to justify their behavior and minimize the consequences that may impact them because of the choices they made in doing nothing.

In the *Ethical Behavior Continuum*, although some individuals may see themselves as residing near the star (★) in *who they think they are*, most people would probably say their pattern of behavior resides somewhere to the immediate right of the NORMATIVE Leader. Their *public persona* would reflect this and they would present a facade of being a person who has got it together. That is, until their “button” is pushed and *who they really are* is unleashed. When this happens, you have a truer picture of the type of person you are dealing with and the impact their behavior will have upon you. For illustrative purposes, I would like to now add a benchmark to the continuum and present a simple model to set the tone for discussing our dysfunctional cultures.

*Human Nature and the 5Ps
Ethical Behavior Continuum*

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I believe most people reside in the Gray Area of acceptable behavior where the triangle (▲) is located. I believe most people are good people who want to work hard, do the right thing and really care about their fellow human beings. However, we inevitably get caught up in the “dogmas” and normative expectations associated with our religions, political parties, ethnic backgrounds, our social and economic status, and all the other things that define us and the roles we take on as individuals. This sets the foundation for conflict with others.

■ THE CONSERVATIVE, THE LIBERAL AND THE RADICAL ■

While “*all evidence is filtered through the self-serving filter of one’s beliefs,*” when it comes to identifying the various perspectives individuals take on the same issue, they seem to break down into three basic philosophies: *conservative, liberal and radical*. By definition, the conservative is one who holds onto traditional values and politically, favors free enterprise and individual freedom with responsibility. The liberal is willing to respect and accept behavior or opinions different from one’s own; is favorable to individual rights and freedoms and moderate reform. The radical is an individual who holds extremist views that departs from tradition and seeks reform through extreme tactics.

Within this context, allow me to offer some thoughts regarding these philosophies and the *general tendencies* of how individuals who identify with each would respond to issues they experience. In using the behavioral parameters of the three cultures that I presented in Chapter 9, let us call Figure 1, conservative, Figure 2, liberal, and Figure 3, radical.

○ *The Conservative*

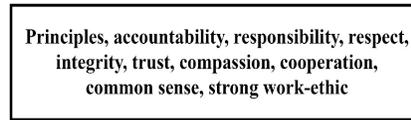


Figure 1

The *conservative* lives in the acceptable behavior area where the triangle is and will occasionally stray into the gray area, but quickly returns to the light gray area due to a crisis of conscience and the uneasy feeling when crossing the line and teetering on the edge of unacceptable behavior. The conservative has a strong sense of knowing the difference between right and wrong. There is stability and consistency within this philosophy, and traditions serve to reinforce the status quo and minimize the need for change.

Common sense, logic, simplicity, and practicality are the filters through which information and situations are assessed. Actions are methodically analyzed and there is much consideration given to the consequences that may be imposed by “crossing the line” when warranted. The conservative tries to affect change by working within the system. When confronted with push-back or political stalemating by the system, the conservative will devise counter strategies that may involve the use of power, politics, and/or profit to some degree. In using these, the conservative seeks to adhere to his principles and is always vigilant to adhere to his code of ethics and not cross into the “point of no return.”

○ *The Liberal*

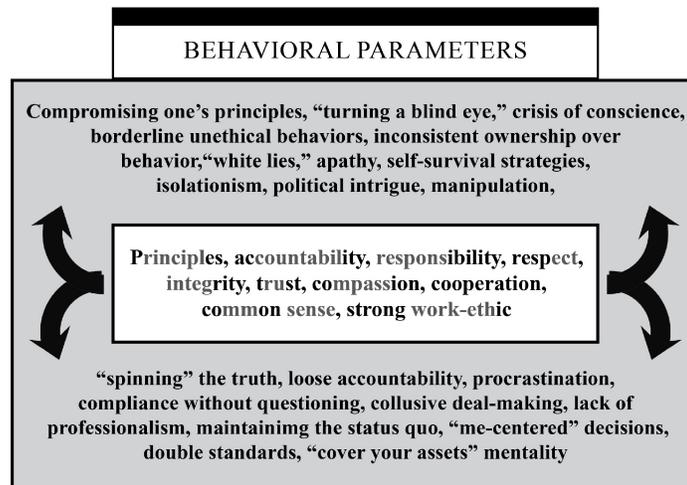


Figure 2

The *liberal* also lives in the gray area of acceptable behavior, but leans more toward the medium gray area. Things are not always black and white for this person and rules and laws are open to personal interpretation and consequently, he frequently crosses the line and “does his own thing” so as to not be controlled or inconvenienced. While challenging the status quo lays the foundation for progress and change, it must be based in common sense and within the scope of the reality of the circumstances that are presented.

The liberal tends to champion causes such as, the environment, social justice, animal rights, diversity issues, and any other actual or perceived injustice. He is the advocate of the unheard, underprivileged, unwanted, and other *innocent victims* who do not have the power to stand up to the injustices they experience within life. However, the prudent person would try to discern the true reality of the individual’s *victim status* before taking up their cause. As I see it, victims fall into three categories:

1) The individuals are truly victims having done nothing to deserve the treatment they received for situations they did not intentionally create.

2) Other times, these individuals are “victims” of their own self- imposed inability to exercise good judgement in choosing a course of action when responding to circumstances they face/create within their lives. Laziness, procrastination and indifference play a major role in the lives of these individuals.

3) Finally, there are the “victims” who consciously manipulate/scam “the system” to obtain benefits for themselves or others via fraud or other unethical or illegal covert activities.

Whatever the victim’s status, the liberal will find a way to justify his course of action in taking up the banner on their behalf, which in large part, fulfills the liberal’s self-serving agenda.

Often, he will pursue a career within a field where he feels he can make the world a better place, or by donating money and/or volunteering his time to his cause. He has many ideas for how things should be and will present his “ideal” utopian scenario to fix a problem without thinking through the logistics of how it will be accomplished and the long-term ramifications of the idea — both real and “unintended.” As someone once said, “*when utopia meets reality, reality always wins!*” But, this doesn’t matter. Most of the time, the government or the wealthy are seen as the “cash cow” for funding. Their heart is in the right place, but their strategy is short-sighted. Worse case scenario is the idea and methodology are a smokescreen to hide the true objective of enhancing the hidden politics, power and/or profit agendas.

○ *The Radical*

The *radical* may have his roots as a conservative or liberal, but because of his inability to accomplish his goals through acceptable means, he has chosen to cross the line, cross the point of no return and resides in the area of unacceptable behavior. He becomes an activist for his cause. His motivation? The passion to “right” the “wrongs” he sees because of having experienced an injustice. Or, maybe to just make the world a better place for everyone — according to his

personal beliefs. He is a zealot, driven by the conscious use of power, politics and profit to accomplish his objective. There are levels of radical extremism and the lengths that an individual will go to achieve his goals. The means through which the radical calls attention to his agendas are determined by the leaders and their attitudes. This is done either by force or sophisticated manipulation (marketing) of his platform to coerce or “motivate” followers to join the cause.

In his book, *Rules for Radicals*, Saul Alinsky outlines the process through which the radical should create/force change. The methods reinforce a win/lose philosophy of intimidation, power, and manipulation of events and circumstances to bully the individual or group into submission. This is the danger of implementing a philosophy without the right attitude behind the skills. While these tactics may provide a short-term victory, in the long-run, once the change has been established, it will eventually expose the radical’s true agenda. Over time, the radical’s “organization” will give way to the corruptive influences of power, politics and profit, and will obtain results far less than promised, or implode due to its dysfunctional culture.

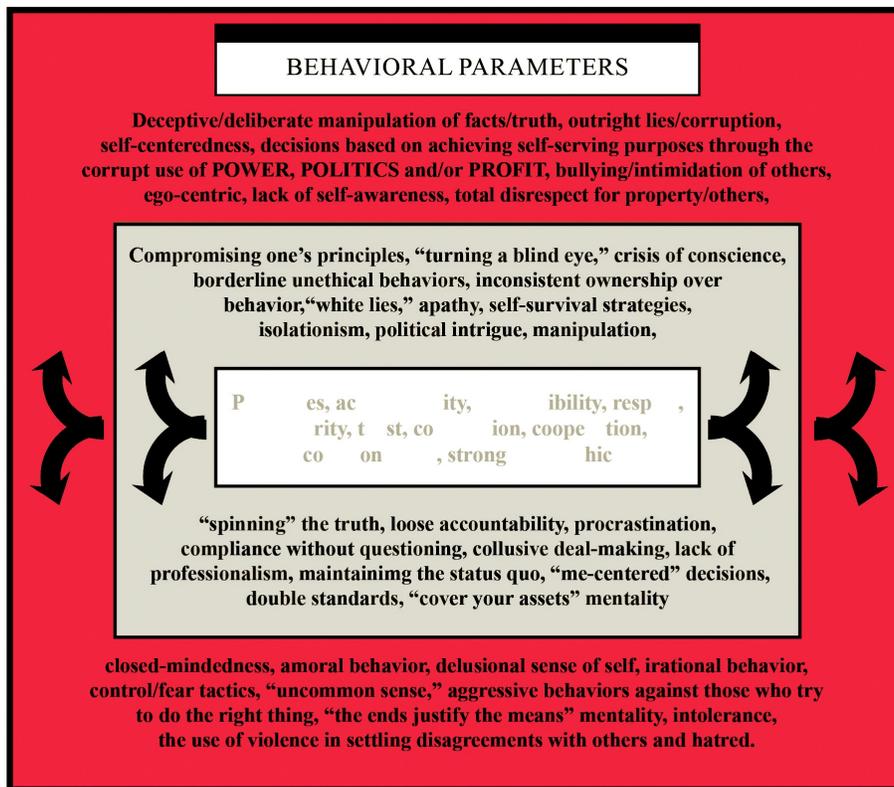


Figure 3

Conservatives and liberals may be drawn to the progressive message of *change*. As the radical outlines his philosophy, the conservative listens cautiously while assessing the leader’s message

through the filter of his beliefs. Deemed too extreme, he distances himself from the leader and his followers. The liberal, however, is intrigued by the message. It strikes a familiar chord what he, too, has been struggling with in life and can identify with in his current circumstances. The radical is now seen as the enlightened savior whose idealistic philosophies will finally, “right the wrongs of the world.” In his mind, these issues are not a priority for the establishment. Most of the time they are right. However, it is only when the establishment is faced with a crisis (out of necessity) that it responds. So, the radical creates a crisis for the establishment.

The followers become enamored by his charisma and consciously *give away their power* to him. Over time, they become “radicalized” and live the extremist philosophy. They become willing pawns to further perpetuate his message and then use their influence to recruit others to join the movement. They are caught up in hype of the purpose and blinded to rational thought and reason. If they do “read the process” and sense the radical’s true hidden agenda, they may just turn a blind eye and continue the facade. They reason: they have a chance to belong to something that can make a difference in their lives and the lives of others who will benefit by the radical philosophy when implemented. It is also an opportunity to fulfill a noble purpose in life and gain status within the leader’s organization. The only problem: *radical change calls for radical means*, and *the ends will justify the means*. Questioning the means could put the follower’s safety in jeopardy for he will be seen as disloyal. The pinnacle of radicalism is pure evil and the absence of love. Once you cross over the point of no return and choose to reside in this area, you have lost your principles and have begun the process of your own demise.

While no philosophy remains pure when adopted by individuals, some people view themselves as a combination of the above philosophies to fit their lifestyles. One may identify as a liberal when it comes to social issues, but a fiscal conservative. Translation: *I’m for all that I think is good and we should help others, but not in my community or with my money*. Or, the conservative who believes everyone should follow the rules, but will take a more liberal or radical perspective and bend them if it involves something he wants or believes in strongly. Then, he will be motivated into some kind of action at some level of liberal or radical behavior to call attention to the issue. When the issue has been settled, he will return to his conservative lifestyle.

Differences that exist among people can, within a principled culture of trust, understanding, mutual respect, and cooperation, give rise to collaborative efforts that can strengthen the bonds of our humanity and enable people to achieve great things. Conversely, without this type of culture, we remain staunch within our beliefs and fail to listen to others causing a breakdown in communications, personal attacks, and conflict. The Leadership Styles in Chapter 6 outlined the pattern of behavior and implications associated with each. When there are philosophical clashes of styles when discussing and/or resolving issues, compounded by the influence of one’s “baggage,” one can easily have his “button” pushed which then leads to more conflict.

I was at a street fair in New York City years ago with my family. We were walking past a row of street vendors who were selling their wares, services, and food. As I walked toward the next booth, the man began selling me on the merits of the organization that he represented. He believed in *his* cause of cleaning up the environment and protecting our water sources. I listened for a while, thanked him for the “education” and began to walk away. He asked if I would like to make a \$10.00 donation to support his cause. “*No thank you,*” I answered as I continued walking. “*How about \$5.00?*,” he asked. I just smiled and shook my head, “no.” He kept asking and decreasing the amount each time. Finally, when he reach \$.01 and had not pressured me to give him any money, he began to berate me. “*Yeah, go back to your big home in the suburbs in your gas-guzzling SUV and squander your money . . .*” I stopped, turned around and said, “*Yeah, but before I do, I’m ‘gonna finish my drink and throw the plastic bottle into the East River in your honor!*” To that, he gave me half a peace sign, I smiled, and continued walking away.

His cause was important to him. I have causes that I support, but this was one I chose not to support. Instead of being respectful of my right to not support his cause, his true self emerged: an arrogant, self-righteous, judgmental, insensitive, disrespectful “bully.” This is one of the tactics that individuals use to manipulate you, con you and/or bully you into doing things you do not want to do. They will say things to promote a feeling of guilt within you until you give your power away to them. When you disagree with their opinion or do not respond in the manner they believe you should, their “button” is pushed, their facade exposed, and they shift to “attack mode.”

Remember, *everybody has a story, and an opinion* based on their belief about certain issues. You must be able to discern the credibility of the individual with whom you are interacting in order to ascertain the validity of the individual’s point of view. You will find that while every one does have an opinion, however, few practice what they preach. You will also find that despite one’s educational credentials, experience, and/or “expertise,” there are a lot of people who *know a lot about nothing*. They speculate on issues based on their experience, subjective opinion/belief, “research” on the internet, or what they have been told, rather than facts, logic, science, and/or common sense. Therefore, make sure that you have properly vetted the individual before aligning yourself with that person. Don’t be fooled by the hype or the phoney charisma he may be displaying. And, always remember the infamous words of the scarecrow in the *Wizard of Oz* when he responded to Dorothy’s question regarding how he was able to talk without a brain. He replied, “*some people without brains do an awful lot of talking, don’t they?*” Some points to consider:

- * Who is this person? His “credentials?” His experience? His credibility? Pattern of behavior? His background? Personal “baggage?” What are his possible hidden agendas relating to politics, power and/or profit? What has this person done in his life to this point to justify his opinion and/or feel you should agree with his opinion/cause?
- * What is the gap between who he thinks he is, his public persona, who he really is, and

how you see this individual?

- * Are his words consistent with his pattern of behavior?
- * Are his ideas/ “facts” grounded in truth and supported by hard evidence?
- * Where would you place this individual on the Force Field? The Polsky Diamond?
- * What is your “sixth sense,” or gut feeling saying about this individual? Why?
- * What do others say about this individual? Can they be trusted?
- * How would you describe this individual? What is your bias toward this individual?
- * What do you think will happen if you choose to follow this individual?

Always be vigilant. Do your homework. Trust your gut feeling. Always hold onto your power and your ethical compass. Remember, no matter what you say or do, you will always be judged in the “*court of public opinion*” — their opinion. Therefore, *consider the source!*

Having said this, you can see why it is important to have a conduit that enables us to transcend our self-imposed biases as conservatives, liberals, and radicals, to a more “enlightened” understanding of the issues we face within the cultures we have created — *without getting defensive or verbally aggressive with one another*. Regarding this dynamic, Ralph Waldo Emerson says, “*Let me never fall into the vulgar mistake of dreaming that I am persecuted whenever I am contradicted.*” Taking the initiative to move further to the left on the Ethical Behavior Continuum from the “triangle” benchmark toward the Helpathy benchmark, will give us a more balanced perspective when having the difficult discussions that we need to have with one another to understand how our cultures have deteriorated and what we must do to fix them. *NORMATIVE Leadership levels the playing field for all parties because of its focus on PRINCIPLES, BEHAVIOR and the real problems — the NORMS within the culture/sub-culture.*

■ THE ELEPHANTS IN THE ROOM ■

“We have met the enemy...he may be we.”

— Walt Kelly

Someone recently commented that the Seven Deadly Sins have become the cornerstone of our world today. The excessive behaviors associated with pride, sloth, greed, gluttony, lust, anger and envy have been the ruination of individuals, groups, organizations and civilizations throughout history. The negative norms associated with these sins are a cancer that has been slowly consuming and transforming the cultures of our organizations by widening the *norm gap* between what is *supposed to happen* and *what really happens*. As the limits for acceptable behavior continue to expand, opportunity behaviors are not just tolerated, they are *reinforced and rewarded*. If we continue to permit this to happen, we will indeed become another footnote

in history regarding how we failed to heed its' lessons. *Change* will happen. It's inevitable. So, the question is: What kind of change do we want to see in our world?

Currently, with the parameters for the culture having expanded to what they are today as seen in Figure 3, we find ourselves in a *severe norms crisis*. It pits the conservative values/behaviors against the liberal/radical values/behaviors that have methodically insinuated their hold over the past 6+ decades. Those within the conservative culture seek to rein in the expanded culture of today, while those who support the liberal/radical culture, seek to expand the behavioral parameters even further in the name of progress and equality for all. And, as in any discussion, there are elements of truth in the data and logic on both sides — according to each group's perspective. The trick is to find the common ground, agree upon it, and move forward with a consensus strategy that all will support.

As you have learned, the wider the norm gap between the formal and the informal organization, the more dysfunctional the culture. This also holds true for the cultures we create in society as a whole. As a leader, you must always remember: *the further one strays from principles, love, and the natural order of things when leading others, the more likelihood the dysfunctional behaviors being modeled and condoned by the leader(s), will eventually become the “new normal” for the followers and thus, expand the behavioral parameters of the current culture.* As you saw in Chapter 10, most leaders don't set out to create dysfunctional cultures. There is a (normative) dynamic that occurs over time as the group evolves, and as the reality of power, politics, and profit influence the human nature of the leader, and followers, it eventually transforms the purpose, and bumps principles further down the ranking. As the parameters for the culture expand, it causes a norms crisis and the followers must choose to conform to the new behaviors, resist, or passively conform by doing nothing. Their choices will enable them survive, belong and gain status within the culture, or put them on a collision course with the leader and his loyal followers.

And so, as a NORMATIVE Leader, when you forge your path, you will “read” the process, the normative expectations and the group dynamics of the groups and events around you, and within your organization as they unfold on a daily basis. You will assess the events through the filter of your normative data base, the Three Constants, and determine how the individual/group culture ranks the Five Ps. Once you assess what is really going on, you must be prepared to do battle with those forces who seek to reinforce the dysfunctional behavior and silence you. With this being said, I would like to offer some observations about the way we do things today in some of our out-of-balance, dysfunctional cultures: