

THE SOULLESS ORGANIZATION: OVERCOMING PORNOGRAPHIC MANAGEMENT

**Prepared by:
Stephen Long, Ph.D.
Motere Consulting**



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The Soulless Organization: Overcoming Pornographic Management

Stephen Long, PhD

Fear ignites the survival instinct in even the most ambitious people. Corporate values such as teamwork and mutual support fly out the window when people are preoccupied with survival and subsequently lose their focus on growth oriented initiatives. It's no wonder a book about the 48 laws of survival barely sold when originally published during the strong economy of 1998, yet at the abyss of the Great Recession it was on every best-seller list. From C-Level Executives down to line supervisors, leaders everywhere continue to share an entrenched anxiety stemming from the recent global recession. Fear permeates organizations like wildfire, touching every department and every person.

Pornography is more of a mindset rather than what is exhibited through film or print media. Studies conducted by noted researchers (Donnerstein, Zillmann & Bryant) identified pornographic attitudes that correlate with unproductive, ineffective management behaviors such as callousness, hostility, professional indifference and emotional detachment. Pornographic Managers are disengaged from their job, their people, their organization and their community. Impossible to define, in 1964 U.S. Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart tried to explain “hard-core” pornography, or what is obscene, by saying, “I shall not today attempt further to define the kinds of material I understand to be embraced...but *I know it when I see it.*” Due to the U.S. Supreme Court finding, pornography is not against the law—neither is the way many managers behave. However, just because it's not against the law, it doesn't mean it doesn't have adverse effects on organizational climate and performance. Pornographic Management may be impossible to define, but *people know it when they see it.*

It's natural to become disengaged and mechanical—to focus solely on survival—when faced with instability and uncertainty. As a result, a generation of ***Pornographic Managers*** is being developed and currently shaping the culture of business for the foreseeable future. Pornographic Management embeds itself between the tissues of convenient fictions. Pornographic Managers lack humanizing qualities and unfortunately are too often the social architects of the 21st century company—***The Soulless Organization.***

Pornographic Managers exhibit no passion, no emotion in their work. Driven by fear, they're afraid to make to a mistake, afraid to go off script and are only able to follow the blueprint set forth by a rigid strategic plan. Pornographic Managers are unable and unwilling to adapt strategy and therefore overlook opportunities along the way. They depend on the corporate hierarchy for power, which further entrenches survival instincts. Pornographic Managers are callous—they lack empathy and purpose. This pedestrian management strategy is hostile, aggressive, less responsive to pain and suffering and more likely to cut corners through corruption. They squander resources for short-term

survival at the expense of long-term growth. Pornographic Managers create resistance and apprehension within the workforce, possibly gaining compliance, but certainly failing to secure commitment.

High Performance Leaders, on the other hand, are concerned with more than survival. As opposed to the position-based executives who preside over an organization, High Performance Leaders are fully integrated into their organization. These unique executives prosper during strong economies as well as recessionary periods by advocating and leading through transparency, empathy and selflessness.

High Performance Leaders are aware of The Conference Board report finding that only 45% of all employees are satisfied in their current job—the lowest levels in two decades! They also recognize a consistent pattern of behavior within Soulless Organizations:

- Lack of control
- Shift of blame and lack of accountability
- Risk-averse
- Extreme social conformity
- Static
- Inability to use abstract concepts to solve concrete problems
- Intolerant and impatient with the workforce

Soulless Organizations are filled with people who are satisfied in their professions—just not their jobs. As one manager stated, “I love my field, I love going to professional conferences, but for one reason or another, the information I get from those meetings never seems to be applied here.” High Performance Leaders confront invisible, but powerful forces before implementing a business strategy designed to take a firm to the next level.

High Performance Leaders know three important leadership principles:

- Leadership is not easy
- Mediocre leadership is the norm
- Leadership is not a list of mechanical tasks, but a system of human interactions

Pornographic Managers aren’t engaged in their jobs and care less about the organizational goals and more about their own personal agendas. They are mechanized and detached, creating a ripple effect throughout the organization.

A compelling vision and a breakthrough strategy are wasted on Pornographic Managers, but cleaning house is only a band-aid solution wasting time and money. High Performance Leaders combine transactional and transformational leadership strategies to resurrect the organizational soul. They develop their staffs individually and collectively, personally and professionally. They free them from fear and help them become more

autonomous and more able to manage with the mass interdependencies within the organization. High Performance Leaders sponsor a social operating system that leverages existing human assets, enabling the organization to capitalize on current market opportunities. They eradicate institutional cynicism by transforming and energizing Pornographic Managers intellectually; developing a sense of teamwork and having them pursue a higher calling than just chasing quarterly earnings—in other words, they help them reclaim their humanity. They help their staff find meaning in their work again. High Performance Leaders connect with their direct reports so they can in turn relate effectively with their people. High Performance Leaders get people to face reality by creating awareness, enhancing communication and developing a sense of stewardship.

Awareness—Leading From the Inside Out

Job satisfaction, engagement and sense of mission improve when people recognize how their talents contribute to the needs of the organization, and many employees require concrete evidence of how their contributions relate to the bigger picture. High Performance Leaders pay attention to the nuances within the organization, whereas people in Soulless Organizations display subtle, almost invisible signs of mechanical behavior sapping passion and purpose out of the organization.

High Performance Leaders face the current reality to develop a compelling vision to guide their people. Leading The Soulless Organization is a different deal, though. High Performance Leaders transform themselves first before they attempt to transform the organization. In The Soulless Organization controlled by Pornographic Managers, High Performance Leaders first question the assumptions they hold about themselves before questioning the assumptions of their employees.

The hard work of connecting to an organization is initiated by questioning beliefs and principles. High Performance Leaders flush out the beliefs that cause conflict. They re-examine beliefs about people and how they work best before they ask people to question their own beliefs. The process helps make sense of complex situations and understand the underlying foundations of an organization. It also helps frame the stakes in a realistic perspective.

Shrewd self-inquiry produces pragmatic actions—idealism alone won't change anything. Shrewd self-inquiry helps High Performance Leaders implement a course of action that delivers results. The process of looking inward culminates in concrete action characterized by pragmatism and doing the right thing.

High Performance Leaders address an additional topic: how to manage the paradox between selflessness and self-interest. Pornographic Managers are in it primarily for their own personal financial gain and therefore fail to gain the trust of their people. The most important contribution High Performance Leaders make to their organization is creating value—for all stakeholders—and High Performance Leaders earn the right to take a piece

of that pie. Those rewards must be driven by something that resides inside of them, something that provides a direction, a moral compass, a foundation to create value for the stakeholders and themselves. High Performance Leaders balance intrinsic needs with extrinsic rewards—the altruistic motive with the profit motive—to create value for the organization.

High Performance Leaders serve two masters: one organizational and one moral. Integrity is often described in naive or simple terms. Integrity is not blind loyalty. Integrity is being dedicated to the truth. Lack of transparency, telling half-truths or even full-blown lies in the name of loyalty weakens leadership integrity. Integrity is not showing commitment to an inappropriate cause. Integrity is showing the willingness to correct mistakes early rather than covering shame and humiliation in the name of consistency. Integrity is not being blunt or overly discrete toward people. Integrity is being open with all constituencies in order to bring about results in an effective, efficient manner.

High Performance Leaders consistently demonstrate integrity and are fully responsible for accepting positive and negative consequences of the acts of the organization. They communicate clearly, honestly, fully and consistently. High Performance Leadership is also known as “honor.” The pursuit of High Performance Leadership is and always has been honorable and, at its best, fully engages and aligns every person in the organization.

Reaching Out—Building the Team

High Performance Leaders build a team in their image—a team expressing creativity, honor and respect, communicating honestly and openly and sharing responsibility and authority. Their strategy centers on integrity. Honest dialogue in personal conversations; honest dialogue in meetings; and honest dialogue in providing feedback. People sense a new way of doing things, permitting them to collaborate and experiment.

Due to early negative experiences, many employees fail to embrace the responsibilities they claim to want, and Pornographic Managers fail to delegate the authority they promise to share. High Performance Leaders repress the basic instinct to control people and processes. High Performance Leaders delegate authority and utilize their employees’ strengths. They reward risk-taking behavior, encouraging others to be more creative and innovative.

The communication skills High Performance Leaders possess are their greatest strengths in building a sense of belonging and a shared purpose. They study the art of coaching and teaching to draw out the genius that resides in all of their people. They reach out by employing three educational methods to build a high performance team: Listening, Empathy and Influence.

Listening is the authentic acceptance of other people's ideas and suggestions. High Performance Leaders foster a strong relationship between listening and productivity, where it's been shown to strengthen follower commitment. Active Listening helps develop a culture where people speak with each other in a way that generates ideas. Closed-ended questions lead to mandatory, binary responses leaving people feeling manipulated rather than empowered. High Performance Leaders ask open-ended questions using words such as "how", "what", and "why", enabling people to elaborate and clarify their responses.

Active Listening helps develop empathy—the ability to appreciate and fully understand the circumstances others face. Pornographic Managers are myopic in scope, believing all members of their organization should view a situation through the same lens as they do. This approach fails to bring people together to accomplish common goals. The leadership challenge is to not impose their perception of a situation on the organization, but rather examine and understand valid, alternative interpretations of the situation. Empathy enables High Performance Leaders to recognize the needs of their people and therefore attend to those needs for the benefit of the organization. They provide a resilient foundation based on humility, forgiveness and acceptance, while at the same time adhering to high expectations. Empathy helps High Performance Leaders create the emotional center of the organization.

High Performance Leaders are better able to influence and persuade their followers. Looking at a situation from multiple vantage points enables them to form a point a view that has the best chance to influence the attitudes and behaviors of others. Alternative viewpoints stem from different beliefs people hold. High Performance Leaders examine all the viewpoints and look for the valid aspects along with the logical flaws in each; then develop a perspective that's sound, plausible and acceptable to the majority of the organization.

The real source of power available to High Performance Leaders comes from their ability to convince others what's the best course of action—rather than relying on their position in the hierarchy, as Pornographic Managers do. High Performance Leaders spread a "can-do" attitude by communicating a perspective that creates enthusiasm rather than resistance toward organizational initiatives.

Stewardship—All Hands on Deck

Ben Franklin said, "We must, indeed, all hang together or, most assuredly, we shall all hang separately." Pornographic Management is characterized by egocentric and self-serving agendas, isolating them from the organization. Transforming to a culture defined by selflessness and interdependence, honorable employees demonstrate a sense of stewardship toward the organization. Engagement and satisfaction increase when people exhibit careful and responsible management toward their place of business.

Stewardship is developed from a position of strength—by doing the right thing. Human nature compels people do everything they can to secure their own position, even if it risks the organization's stability. The initial phase of developing stewardship is empowering people to make sound decisions. Pornographic Managers assume decision-making is avoiding a problem until it can't be overlooked, then identifying previous courses of actions and selecting one that provides the path of least resistance and the greatest expediency. High Performance Leaders take responsibility for their organizations by first understanding what they want to accomplish. They identify all the factors associated with the problem, followed by developing possible solutions. This is followed by recognizing the probable outcomes of each option. Sound judgment is shown when the option that best fits the original purpose is selected.

The second phase of stewardship is demonstrated when each employee is doing everything within their power to grow the company. Execution is vital to growth, where people successfully get things done for not only themselves, but for others and the organization. They know what they have to do and when they will have it done. They're not just playing along—they're playing to win for their own benefit and the benefit of everyone else. The gap between strategy and execution decreases significantly because High Performance Leaders are committed to growing the company.

The third phase of stewardship is defining the organization's role and responsibility in the community in which it operates. Organizations have a legacy to uphold and must purposefully contribute to society. High Performance Leaders engage their employees by thinking boldly and imaginatively about how to best contribute to society. High Performance Leaders create excitement by demonstrating the ability to motivate people—they stimulate their minds, engage their hearts and stir their souls. They question conventional wisdom and by doing so, change the current reality in which their people operate. People recognize the organization is an integral part of the community, and they have a responsibility to contribute to not only the growth of the organization, but also the community. They realize that one feeds the other and their contribution, no matter how small or how large, helps everyone inside and outside the organization.

Conclusion

Soulless organizations are filled with “the walking dead.” Interdependencies exist up and down the organizational chart and between the concrete and the abstract. Pornographic Managers make the fatal mistake of acting in mechanical, detached manners. Engaging the organization begins with a personal transformation, and High Performance Leaders recognize change starts with them. They won't affect change in others unless they affect change within themselves. High Performance Leaders demonstrate “Executive Presence” and their people realize something special is going to happen when their boss walks into the room.

Teamwork is defined by people taking responsibility, rather than shifting blame. High Performance Leaders set the stage so people begin to trust each other through open communication and transparency. The stability of the organization strengthens when people become stewards. They are conduits between the organization and the community, enhancing personal and collective reputations by doing the right thing. Feeding the organizational soul creates consistent performance and builds market share. Bottom line, the Pornographic Management model is bad for business.

Humanism is good business. The illusion of organizations acting like machines that can only be enhanced through re-engineering, optimizing, streamlining and fine tuning is an assumption that has been proven false time and time again. Over the latter half of the 20th century High Performance Leaders have learned from Maslow, Drucker, McGregor, Bennis, Kotter, Senge and others, that the most important asset is people, and the best way to maximize this asset is to infuse the soul back into the organization.

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