

**Stirring the Pot: A Managerial Approach
(to assess the depth of chapter discontent)
By Chuck Sweeney**

“How beautiful is success! How bright it gleams, with its illusions, aspiration and dreams!”¹

Having weathered a journey to build a successful organizational culture, a chapter is insulated from a spiral into nonexistence. Then after years of doing the right thing and understanding the merits of a strong Bylaws, which facilitates continuity of command and a philosophical reality that chapters are not cookie-cutter organizations but entities grounded in our forefathers dreams, things change. No longer is the point of focus on programs consistent with what is receptive in the chapter’s community and which works well because they are national programs, with meaningful funding and backing at the highest levels. Instead issues arise, questioning that a healthy and successful organization has people who can agree to disagree without walking-out; threatening to resign; or quitting to serve the SAR.

When questionable issues arise, conflict is pretty much inevitable, especially when someone who is new to the chapter wants to bring in methods that worked well in a corporate setting but has limited knowledge and understanding of the chapter’s “Organizational Culture.” Or when a previous leader, who has passed the gavel but hasn’t accepted the ethics associated with becoming a good follower, ignores the danger signs which lead a chapter toward the “spiral into nonexistence.”²

Conflict isn’t necessarily bad. Healthy and constructive conflict is a component of high-functioning chapters. Conflict understandably can arise when Compatriots who hold varying real world skills and experiences arrive at different points of view. The glue that cements viewpoints from exploding into a full-blown dispute are a set of well-constructed Bylaws and a working knowledge of Robert’s Rules of Order. Both documents are essential. They help to maintain a healthy balance between constructive difference of opinion; and when effectively employed they minimize the disquiet associated with intra-chapter conflict that’s destructive and disruptive.

Thus the purpose of this paper is to stimulate thought and to create awareness at the chapter level that stirring the pot is essential when two realities become apparent.

First, when the leadership team is not working well together. Next, when discontent exists but it’s not readily clear who’s stirring the pot.

When the leadership team isn’t working well, conflict must be acknowledged and defined before it can be managed and resolved. Chapters have a tendency to hide their problems and leaders have a tendency to ignore the first signs of conflict as being trivial or too difficult to differentiate between what’s normal or what’s a healthy exchange of ideas. Understanding when conflict is real and not perceived, study the wisdom of George Patton and Peter Drucker, for both men agree the right thing is more important than doing with great efficiency that which shouldn’t be done at all. Further, case studies concerning organizational conflict can be traced to the fact task conflict associates with growth in relationship conflict.³ Relational conflict arises when former leaders fail to become key followers and fail to assist an incoming leader to reach his full leadership potential.

Ronald E. Riggio, Ph.D., associate dean of the faculty at the Kravis Leadership Institute at Claremont McKenna College in Claremont, California, notes “being a good follower is complicated in ways that are rather similar to being a good leader.” It means being engaged. It means paying attention. It means having the courage to speak up when something’s wrong. And it means having the energy and activism to support a follow-on leader to do things wisely and well.

Discontent exists but it’s not apparent. Two giants in distinctly different leadership fields knew the importance of awareness. George Patton and Peter Drucker had seen firsthand what happens when organizations stop functioning. Both men agree when confronted with uncertainty: take action to understand doubt and what isn’t said.



When in doubt, observe and ask questions.

George S. Patton

Known widely as the father of management, Peter Drucker immigrated to the United States in 1937. He formulated many concepts of the first order, and expressed them simply and elegantly. “In a career that produced 39 books, as well as lectures, classes,

¹ Adapted from *Morituri Salutamus*—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

² *Building a Successful Organizational Culture*. Click here to read: <http://www.saramanasar.org/other-documents.html>

³ *When Task Conflict Becomes Personal*, Hannes Guenter, Maastricht University, Tongersestraat 53, 6211LM Maastricht, The Netherlands.

consultations, and even movies, Drucker anatomized the functioning (and dysfunctioning) of companies,”⁴

Drucker was known to gently chide ambitious leaders who pursue personal success over the pursuit of organizational success. In *The Effective Executive*, he wrote “Efficiency is doing things right. Effectiveness is doing the right thing.” When effectiveness falls to the waste-side and discontent emerges, Drucker would have strong feelings on the importance of recognizing and promoting independent leaders to do the right thing. He would find it difficult to encourage an independent effort of existing leaders going alone to do things right. After all, successful organizations are built on trust, and trust is built on communication and mutual understanding.

Who’s stirring the pot? In the absence of trust and mutual understanding an atmosphere of discontent and conflict ultimately comes to the fore. When a hidden agenda is suspected by chapter members or if threats by Compatriots to quit service to the SAR arise, such unsettling possibilities are certain to find a feedback channel to the chapter leader. Once he is apprised, a good leader becomes proactive to determine if such bad news is valid.

Asking the right question is essential of those who are possibly knowledgeable about the source of discontent. According to Drucker, the most common source of a management mistake here is not the failure to find the right answer, but the failure to ask the right question...”

Nothing more dangerous than the right answer to the wrong question, is the failure of open and meaningful communication to achieve trust. A leader would be wise to avoid a threatening exchange; yet, the closer a leader comes in conversation with one who may have abused his position of power the more defensive he may become. Despite this and according to Peter Drucker--

The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn't said.



Stated differently, the key to understanding the depth of discontent in a chapter is to fashion an opening statement. For example, “A concern seems to exist that our leadership team isn’t working together.” Then ask a simple question, “Who’s stirring the pot?” Then listen.

In Summary

Don’t let your chapter die because discontent arises, questioning that a healthy and successful organization has people who can agree to disagree without walking-out; threatening to resign; or quitting to serve the SAR.

Know the danger signs that a chapter is dying:

1. Having weathered a journey to build a successful organizational culture, a chapter is insulated from a spiral into nonexistence. Then after years of doing the right thing and understanding the merits of a strong Bylaws, which facilitates a philosophical reality that chapters aren’t cookie-cutter organizations but entities grounded in our forefathers’ dreams, things change.

2. When a previous leader, who has passed the gavel but not the ethics associated with becoming a good follower, ignores the danger signs which lead a chapter toward a “spiral into nonexistence.” Chief in this regard are recommending to the membership Bylaws change to facilitate personal success over the pursuit of organizational success.

3. When confronted with uncertainty, a leader fails to take action to minimize discontent and to illuminate that which isn’t being said when proposing change.

Author's Mini Bio: Elected Past President of the Saramana Chapter; Elected Past President of the Naples Chapter. Current service includes Chairman of the SAR Veterans Recognition Committee, Webmaster of the VRC Website at <http://www.VetCorps.info>; Member of the SAR Strategic Planning, Solid Light (Ad-Hoc: Museum & Education Center Project), and SAR ROTC/JROTC & Service Academies Liaison Committees; South Atlantic District Webmaster at <http://www.SoAtlanticDist.Info>; Elected Florida SAR Recording Secretary; Previous Promotion & Retention Chairman. Additional Previous SAR service included Elected Florida SAR Senior VP, Color Guard Commander, and Chairman of various committees such as those addressed in the article “Building a Successful Organizational Culture: Don’t let your Chapter die!” at <http://www.saramanasar.org/other-documents.html>.

⁴ *The Wisdom of Peter Drucker from A to Z*, by Leigh Buchanan at <http://www.inc.com/articles/2009/11/drucker.html>