



The Cambridge Perspective

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'Wink Wink' Leadership



The business community pays heavily for the actions of the few bad apples, who through unchecked success, bureaucratic training, arrogance or naiveté, fall into the trap of 'wink wink' leadership.

The Sarbanes-Oxley law was created as a result of it; politics and advertising fuel it; and most people can name at least one good example of it in the media right now. So what, exactly, is it?

Simply put, it's "do as I say, not as I do" leadership.

Some 'wink wink' leaders/managers believe the rules don't apply to them, others that "it's just the way it's

done", and some don't even realize they are doing it. Most just don't think anyone will notice, but it's an infectious disease that trickles quickly down through an organization and can have devastating results.



Sure, there are times when it's necessary to break the rules. But we're talking about breaking the rules indiscriminately, not strategically.

Senior management sets the tone for the entire organization, so when a leader acts unethically, makes false claims or promises, fails to follow up on improper conduct or acts in a hypocritical manner, he/she tacitly gives approval for others to do the same.

Employees catch on to the hidden message and learn to ignore company policies, cut corners and become complacent.

Great leaders and managers are passionate about what they do.

They genuinely believe in what they are doing, and therefore, they are prepared to 'walk the walk' to make their vision happen. It's this kind of passion that makes employees want to follow, and attracts top talent to work for an organization.

So how can you avoid hiring a 'wink wink' leader or manager?

Don't Cut Corners

- Plan to conduct a full and objective search process that includes external candidates, rather than relying on referrals from insiders or associates.
- Hire an executive search partner to effectively identify qualified, industry-leading talent and thoroughly investigate candidates to verify their achievements and track records.

Invest in Quality

- Quality talent doesn't come cheap. Know what the market is paying and be sure you're offering a competitive compensation and benefits package to attract well respected talent.
- Try to be flexible and creative in the negotiation process to make your opportunity more intriguing to the selected candidate,

Since
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2323 Yonge St., Ste. 203
Toronto, ON, M4P 2C9
Phone: 416-484-8408
Fax: 416-484-0151
mail@cambridgemgmt.com
www.cambridgemgmt.com



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i.e. offering association memberships, relocation assistance, professional development or flex time/travel arrangements.

Investigate Thoroughly

- Don't get fixated on the functional fit alone – keep the larger picture in mind. How well does the candidate fit into the organization's long-term business objectives and how will they perform in this kind of environment or culture?
- Look for a leader/manager who is willing to discuss both successes and failures. We learn most from our failures, and great leaders will take responsibility for both.
- Watch for signs of arrogance, vagueness, contradictions, gossiping and other 'red flags' that indicate lack of integrity or questionable ethics.
- Focus on execution, as well as vision. How has the leader/manager successfully executed their plans in the past – or have they just ridden the crest of someone else's success?
- Be sure that your search firm does 360° reference checks that

include subordinates, who are the most likely to notice - and resent - 'wink wink' leadership.

Nurture and Inspire Excellence

- Deliver what you promise throughout the recruitment process, treating candidates with respect with regards to their time and need for confidentiality – and be sure your search firm represents you accordingly.



- Provide a clear professional development and succession path, when possible, to demonstrate that the company is committed to its employees.
- Consider professional onboarding and/or coaching for your new leader or manager to assist their integration, help build confidence with 'early wins', and develop a strategy for long-term success.

Great leaders and managers understand that big picture thinking is critical to the organization's vision, but 'shooting lower and scoring higher' is the key to successful execution. They've learned that to earn and keep customers for the long-term, they must deliver what they promise - every time - or risk their reputation.

Finding passionate, inspiring leaders/managers to fit your organization's culture and achieve its long-term objectives can be difficult, but well worth the effort when you consider that the future of the organization is in their hands. And that's no winking matter!

Cambridge Management Planning has provided executive search and recruitment services in Toronto, Canada and internationally since 1976. Cambridge works in partnership with our clients to achieve performance objectives and improve profitability.

Cambridge Management Planning Inc. has been providing executive search and human resources consulting across Canada and internationally since 1976. Cambridge offers a full suite of services including Executive Search, Board Search, Interim Management, Career Transition and Training & Development services.

Call us for more information:

**2323 Yonge Street
Ste. 203**

**Toronto, Ontario
Canada M4P 2C9**

**Telephone: 416-484-8408
www.cambridgempmt.com**

**There are two rules for success:
1) Never tell everything you know.**

-- Roger H. Lincoln

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