

DESPISED

438 to 440

by James Collins

Some people are disliked by a few people, some shunned by many, fewer are despised by all. It was my bad luck to encounter one of these during my working career. The man we shall refer to as Gunny, was an inveterate liar. You could not believe anything he told you and you had to double check on all facts that came out of his mouth. It did not take long for the majority of people working with him to understand that this was his nature. He also gained a reputation for stabbing people in the back. He would smile at them on one hand and destroy them when their back was turned. By using this technique of destroying people just ahead of him in the organizational line, he managed to work himself up to a significant management position. Nobody trusted him. Nobody liked him.

One day the general manager came into my office and told me that he was considering moving Gunny into a significant management position in a new organization we were starting. I was stunned.

“Boss, how can you even consider this guy for a position like that? Everybody in the organization dislikes him and distrusts him. He will not get any cooperation from anyone in the organization. All the departments will turn a blind eye to his entreaties and will try to make him fail.”

“Jim I’m aware of that and I’ve taken that into consideration but I’m seriously thinking of making this move.”

“Besides me, how many other members of your staff have you talked to and what was their position on this matter?”

“Counting you I’ve spoken with 13 of the 14 members of the staff and they will side with your position.”

“13 out of 14 say no and you still going along with this. Who is the 14th member?”

He mentioned a manager whose name was Sid.

“You never talked to Sid directly did you?”

The boss looked stunned. “Well no. I never talked to Sid, I just made an assumption.”

“Well why don’t you go back, talk to Sid, get his opinion, just like everybody else and we’ll talk again.”

The next day the boss again appeared in my office.

“Jim I went back and talked to Sid and I was totally amazed when he agreed with you. How did you know? Since Gunny originally hired Sid and promoted him three times, I felt that Sid was in his camp and was beholden to him. Apparently, I was wrong and when I asked Sid to explain why; he described the same reasons you did. Apparently, the vote is 14 out of 14 not to give him the position. In spite of that, I still plan to promote him. After all, I am still the boss and in the end, the decision is up to me. I approach you gentlemen for advice but in the end I have to take the heat and I have to make the final decision.”

“There is an old Irish saying that if nine people tell you are you are drunk lie down. In this case, you have 14 people telling you the decision is wrong. Yet you are going to go and make it anyway. Can you tell me why?”

The enigmatic answer makes me unsettled to this very day.

“Well Jim, we always need a snake.”

Gunny received his promotion and as predicted, undermined, and undercut every other operation in the organization. He was totally despised and then , 4 years later, he died.

In many people’s eyes, a dead person is instantly canonized. The devil becomes a saint. Thirteen of the fourteen managers showed up in my office asking me to go to Gunny’s funeral with them. I politely declined and told them I would not be a hypocrite. I disliked Gunny intently. I told him so to his face and I was not about to change my opinion just because he died. The other 13 attended the funeral. I did not. I sleep quite peacefully every night.

THE END