

**Submission for April 2009 CW Bulletin**

**INSIDE THE MIND OF MANAGEMENT\*:  
Who They Are and What They Need  
Are You Ready to Help During These Terrible Times?**

***By James E. Lukaszewski, ABC, APR, Fellow PRSA***

This article is a preview of some of the important topics you will hear in more detail on Wednesday, April 29, if you attend Jim Lukaszewski's IABC Web-based teleseminar. See the registration information below.

Recent events mean that a lot more has changed than just the stock market. These changes mean that management at almost every level is more distracted than ever. But the savvy executive knows that marshalling communications power is every bit as important as having a strategy or winning product. The issue for us as individual advisors is, with all the distractions, gaining a sufficient level of their attention to have the kind of impact that makes a difference.

The *Conference Board Review* reports in its April/May 2009 issue, that the average tenure of the CEO of a publicly held U.S. company has now diminished to approximately 36 months or less. That's down from 41 months, just two years ago. Whether you work for the CEO or not, this severely truncated career path affects every manager in the business, every business plan, and every strategy. This observation brings me to the central point of this article, that far more often than not, I witness internal communications and external advisors giving advice to management and managers without having a clue as to who these people are, what they do each day, what their real stresses and strains are, and the kind of help they need.

Just the week before this article was drafted, I was meeting with a Fortune company CEO in his office. I was invited by the legal department to offer advice to a handful of senior executives on an urgent matter facing the company. While I was in conference, the head of corporate communications (who did not know I was there, and whom the boss had asked me not to call) arrived with a message for the boss. She walked in, was just a bit startled to see me, but nevertheless delivered her message. Out of courtesy, the boss then gave her a run down on what we were talking about. She then very brightly and smartly offered almost a half dozen ideas about how to proceed on the issue.

Essentially, she was asking the boss why this guy was here (meaning me) when she was alive and had been slaving over his fires for a number of years. When she left, the boss exploded. He said, "Shirley (not her real name) has been with me for almost the entire time I have been CEO. She knows everything. I rely on her and trust her, but this is the most irritating thing she does. Now, I'm going to have to go down the hall today or tomorrow morning and say no to the six things she suggested, even though I just briefed her on why you are here and the issue we are facing and have been facing for a very long time."

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So what is the lesson of this story? The first lesson is you need to know about bosses. Start with why bosses get fired, why their tenure is shrinking, and begin to think of your advice giving at a much higher and more strategic level. Let me just review with you the reasons CEOs lose their jobs. This data comes from a variety of major business magazines, each of which does periodic surveys of why CEOs lose their positions.

1. **Failure to perform and produce:** Makes good sense. CEOs are hired to do a job and get things done. If they fail to do that, they're gone.
2. **Overoptimism:** You may be really good at your job as a communicator, but the fact is the boss is probably the best PR person in the entire shop. They can make more silk purses per day than anyone. They are over-optimistic. They are highly pleased with how things are going, even if they are going badly. Many of them are going to get enormous bonuses (yes, even now), whether they perform or not. Sooner rather than later someone on the board notices that what is delivered fails to meet the promise and the publicity, and this can cost the CEO his or her job.
3. **People trouble:** After choosing where the organization is heading, and establishing new and more powerful directions and strategies, it is the job of the CEO to put key people in place to make the dream happen. If there are problems with these people, for any reason, it reflects on the CEO's competence in many areas. People trouble is very high on the list for costing CEOs their positions because once decisions are made; someone other than the CEO has to get it done.
4. **Absent without leave (AWOL):** In this day and age, bosses need to be at their desks, or doing the work they have to do outside the organization that contributes directly to the success of operations. Public appearances, speeches, books, activity in trade associations—all of these wonderful things which people like communicators plan for them, take them away from their most important tasks. If the boss is gone long enough, those who run the place will find somebody who can sit at their desk more frequently and get things done.
5. **Stuck in the mud:** While this is number 5 on the list, it is quite often the reason that receives the most visibility when the business press and other news stories begin to develop about companies failing to move ahead. Some of the brightest executives America has produced have totally bombed on their next job, even after a great build up, simply because they were unable to make an organization they were leading move ahead.

So why does any of this matter? Now you have some things to think about strategically when you are talking to that boss of yours—whether it is someone inside the organization or the top executive.

Most bosses walk around aggressively and with great purpose, even though their world may be crumbling around them because of one, some, or all of these job killing circumstances.

Your job as an advisor is to examine the environment of these individuals and take some concrete steps to help them resolve the issues or deficiencies they face.

In my book, *Why Should the Boss Listen to You: The Seven Disciplines of the Trusted Strategic Advisor*, Jossey-Bass, 2008, I tell the story of a young communications executive within a corporation who, like Shirley, was surprised to see me one day. While I was at her organization, she made it a point to really observe why the boss called me and other outsiders in even though she had enormous experience. To make a long story short, as she was taking me to the airport I asked her what she had learned about why I was asked in, and had she figured it out. She answered, “Yes,” emphatically. So I asked, “What did you learn?” She said, “It took me awhile to figure out the reason he called you and all these other consultants in. It’s because he’s scared to death. He wants to hear every possible viewpoint he can before making key decisions, and I just never thought of it that way.” I said, “When did you know?” She said, “I asked him and he told me just how scared he was.”

The next time you complain about the boss not taking your advice, it’s time to think about two things. First what you’re advising probably doesn’t matter. So unless it’s unethical, immoral, illegal, or financially irresponsible, move on to something else. We are staff people. We are paid to have ideas to work on. Communicators in particular are good at thinking up new ideas. Move along and stop whining about it. Second, he or she needs to hear more voices. Rather than griping about the fact that the boss takes so long to decide about your ideas, find out what it is the boss needs to know more and get the voices in who can give good advice, whether they agree with you or not. This is the sign of a trusted strategic advisor. Being on the spot, helping out from the boss’s perspective every single time, and having the discipline to understand that rather than being the sole source of information with bosses, your job is to be the source for a great deal of information from which the boss will make his or her decisions.

There is an old management axiom that says the only time you really learn how to run your business is when it’s in trouble, and your job and your reputation are on the line. Ask yourself this question today, “How much of what is happening in your company today is the result of the current economic crisis, the natural cycle of business failure and success, or management’s mistakes in judgment?” Then ask yourself, “Where do I fit into the solution to these realities?” Go there just as fast as you can.

- \* Jim Lukaszewski’s next IABC Web-based teleseminar “Inside the Mind of Management: Who Are They, Where Do They Come From, What Do They Want, What Are They Trying to Accomplish?” is on Wednesday, April 29, 2009, from 12:00 to 1:30 p.m. EDT. Please visit [www.krm.com/IABC](http://www.krm.com/IABC) to find out more about the program and to register. IABC and the Lukaszewski Group offer you, and all participants registered at your site, a 50% discount on products relating to this program. This offer is good for up to one year from the day of the program.