

Molehills: Evidence Of Subterranean Sabotage

Don't Let Unresolved Issues Undermine Your Leadership Effectiveness

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Have you ever dealt with moles? No, I'm not speaking of the trademark blemishes of Julia Roberts or Paula Abdul. Instead, I'm referencing those subterranean excavators of the Phylum: Chordate and Class: Mammalian.

There are few things as frustrating as a mole infestation. Anyone "fortunate" enough to have had his or her lawn defaced by these fuzzy dynamos will attest - it's no fun. The damage and destruction can be quite extensive.

Neither is it fun to have "moles" undermine your effectiveness as a leader. Just as those small subterranean saboteurs leave tell-tale signs on the surface, similar tell-tale signs are left when teams have unresolved conflict burrowing just under the surface.

Are there unresolved or unaddressed issues in your team? The odds would suggest yes.

The leader that allows team members to pretend that everything is "ok," when in fact things aren't near "ok," is littering his or her organizational lawn with molehills. And while the first thought might be, "Oh that's not so bad, after all they're only molehills." The reality is that these molehills can create a mountain of inefficiency, ineffectiveness, and outright incivility.

In an organizational or team setting, molehills (which are the result of sweeping conflict, animosity, and discontent under the proverbial rug) become additional opportunities for your associates to trip over unsettled issues. Consequently, the team's footing becomes rocky, treacherous, and unstable. When it comes to your organizational landscape, every leader would do well to remember that molehills are far more dangerous than they are unsightly.

History provides a perfect example to illustrate the challenges and perils of a landscape littered by molehills. In 1702, William III of England died from pneumonia. More accurately, he died as a result of his horse tripping over a molehill and throwing William to the ground. In the fall, William suffered the seemingly minor injury of a broken collarbone. However, due to complications during his recovery, William contracted pneumonia which precipitated his subsequent demise. William's experience should serve as a poignant reminder that molehills are more dangerous than they are unsightly.

As is evident by their body configuration, moles are diggers, and they are very very good at it. According to the Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife, moles tunnel at a rate of 15 feet per hour. I can't give you a rate as to how quickly unresolved issues burrow into your team's effectiveness, but suffice it to say their presence and persistence is problematic.

Lamentably, many leaders fail to understand the potential damage caused by ignoring unresolved issues. Just like ignoring an infestation of moles, eventually the very earth on which you stand can become catacombed and fragile. Failing to confront what needs to be confronted and failing to challenge what needs to be challenged will assuredly weaken your leadership platform.

Undoubtedly, unresolved issues can be pests, much like a labour of moles. Here are 3 keys to keeping your organizational landscape free of those pesky subterranean saboteurs:

Make The Environment Inhospitable: Ensure your team culture is proactive toward addressing unresolved conflict. Provide both a clear expectation of putting issues on the table and the mastery of skill sets to facilitate resolution. Unwholesome conflict can't thrive in an environment characterized by a strong commitment to communication and accountability. Such an environment is highly inhospitable to moles of all sorts.

Survey The Landscape – Continually: Keep an eye on the dynamics of your team. Watch for increased sniping and unusually critical commentary by co-workers and colleagues. Additionally, observe and note when co-workers opt-out or avoid working with particular associates. These behaviors (and others like them) are analogous to molehills. Remain diligent in surveying and monitoring your organizational landscape to keep your area mole free.

Upon Discovery, Act Quickly: Wildlife experts suggest that moles are not social critters, but one mole can do significant damage to lawns and crops. The same might be said of unresolved issues amongst team members. You don't have to have many to have a mess. So upon discovering even a single molehill, act quickly. It's a lot easier to address and correct the early symptoms than to stagger and stumble over a plethora of unproductive and dysfunctional behaviors. Act now.

If unresolved issues are left addressed they mar the quality of the work relationship and damage the roots of creativity, collaboration, and productivity. The simple keys presented above will help to ensure your organizational landscape reflects the many hours of planning and hard work you've invested. When it comes to your organizational landscape every leader would do well to remember that molehills are far more dangerous than they are unsightly.

Leadership Lesson: Unresolved issues, though they may resided just under the surface, leave tell-tale signs of their presence, much like the tell-tale sign of a mole's presence - the molehill. These mammalian subterranean saboteurs can do great damage quickly, and the same is true of unresolved conflict. The German origin of the word mole means "one who throws dirt." Don't let unresolved issue excavate your leadership platform right from underneath you and throw dirt in the face of your leadership effectiveness.

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