

# **An Introduction to the Dark Side of Leadership and Management**

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After several years working as a practitioner, student, and teacher, I've encountered a few managers, supervisors, and administrators that are truly deceitful, manipulative and self-serving (only a few). As a student I was only taught good and ideal leadership techniques and management practices. When I entered the real world as a naive and trusting sort, I was quickly deceived and manipulated much to my disappointment and astonishment. When I began teaching recreation leadership and administration classes, I felt that I was doing the same disservice to my students. Now I include a section on harmful and deceptive leadership practices with the understanding that we are to learn the dark ways of the Force to be on guard against them, neither to be seduced by them nor practice these manipulative ways ourselves.

Since the activity is both about deception and based on deception, it is presented here just as it would present it to the students. If this seems cruel after reading the first part, please continue reading to the end for the explanation.

The only material needed for this exercise is a list of items from an old bomb shelter activity. It consists of a list of rather mundane items that the participant is supposed to rank in order of importance for surviving in a bomb shelter for two weeks during a nuclear attack. It also consists of an answer key in which some unidentified experts have ranked the items. This way the participants' ranking can be compared to an expert ranking.

I tell the students this: As a group, they must rank the items in order of importance and when they are done, I will compare each item's rank with the expert rank and record the difference. If the total differences for all of the ranked items is less than or equal to 25, they will all get a 100 substituted for their lowest quiz grade. If the total difference for all of the ranked items is greater than 25, I will give them an actual quiz at the end of class on the reading assignment that they forgot to do.

There is *only one* more detail that they need to know. There is at least one saboteur in the group. Before class today I spoke to at least one of the students here and gave them the task of insuring that the group does not survive in the bomb shelter.

They are to do this by getting the group to score greater than 25. The reward for the saboteur or saboteurs is exactly the opposite as the rest of the class. That is; a score of greater than 25 results in them getting a quiz grade substituted as a 100, where a score of 25 or less results in them taking an actual quiz. This is the conclusion of the student instruction for the activity.

Now the class has approximately 20 minutes to rank their items for survival. They usually spend their time arguing and accusing one another of being the saboteur. It is often the students who are the typical leaders that fall under suspicion first. Then they accuse those students who get to class first, or who are known to visit my office. Any one with a strong opinion or who tries to change an established order of items falls prey to the accusations and the distrust. If for some reason the group is working together, I remind them that the saboteur seems to be doing a nice job. Each time they get close to agreeing on a final order of items, I look at the list and say: "So the saboteur agrees with this order too?" That is usually enough to get them going again.

When they appear to be about to give up, or getting nowhere for the fourth or fifth time, I agree to help them. I identify someone who is definitely Not one of the saboteurs. I try to pick the quietest and most reserved person in the group and indicate that this person is not one of the saboteurs. Now the entire group usually turns to that one person for leadership and to get their approval of the ranked items. Eventually they give me their completed list and we score it up on the board.

Now I tell the class the terrible truth. There were no saboteurs. This is their introduction to deceptive management techniques, specifically DIM, Divide, Intimidate, Manipulate.

I created division by giving them a believable reason to distrust one another. Then I kept this division alive by occasionally stirring them up when it looked like they were getting along too well together. I always directed their attention to the non-existent saboteur so that they wouldn't notice that I was the one causing trouble.

I created a situation of intimidation by having something at stake that appeared valuable (the quizzes). With something so important at risk, they were more likely to become stressed and focus on the task rather than question my behavior or motives.

I manipulated them by both keeping them distrustful of one another, and appointing my choice of students as the leader. This could have been a student who would not otherwise have been given a leadership position by the group, or who I knew would side with me on any future issue. Once the leader had my backing, the students never questioned this chosen leader's ability to provide them with the best solution.

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As a result, those in the group who had the potential to be the better leaders for this activity, were viewed with suspicion and became ineffective. Instead, I was able to get the group to approve of my choice of who should lead. While I could have done so with the authority of being their professor and having them merely accept my choice, I was able instead to do it in a way that left them grateful and truly trusting in my choice for leader.

Once I explain all of the details of what I have done, and the potential it has in a non-classroom setting, the students often recall other times when they have had similar experiences. This usually gets us talking about other deceptive and manipulative things that bosses, coaches, parents, and friends do (teachers and professors are not always excluded from this list). We also discuss how to guard against these situations and, most important, deal with them appropriately.

As for the quiz reward; regardless of the final score, I give them the replacement quiz grade of 100 for participating so cooperatively in my scheme.