

Manager's Dilemma: From Friday Hunch to Monday Disaster



Ever worried throughout the weekend that a call you didn't take on Friday afternoon, as you were headed out of the practice, could turn out on Monday that it had been assigned elsewhere?

"The signal was there, telling you that something wasn't quite right, but you rushed past it and dove into other tasks," writes Jesse Sostrin, author on management and a director at PwC's U.S. Leadership Coaching Centre of Excellence.

"If you had stopped to reflect on Friday afternoon's hunch about that uncomfortable meeting, would you have realised what went wrong, reached out to the team, and at least given yourself a chance to address its concern?" he asks.

Sostrin argues that the ability to handle these situations depends on the sensitivity to the nagging thoughts and gut feelings that are all too easy to ignore.

"I call them contradictions because they run contrary to the ingrained thinking that carries most people through the day. To 'follow the contradictions' means paying attention to the people and circumstances around you, pausing to consider any faint indicators that something may be wrong. This can reveal cracks that may exist in the logic of your everyday beliefs, which are all too easy to overlook when you're constantly putting out fires."

Why is it so difficult to notice and consider the inner echoes of a contradiction? Part of the answer lies in the manager's dilemma: as someone in a leadership position, "you simply do not have the resources, either within the organisation or yourself, to handle the demands on your attention and time. By trying to accommodate every request, you only fall further behind. This leads to counterproductive behaviour patterns that further deplete your already compromised capacity. One of the first capabilities compromised is the ability to remain present and follow the contradictions. And that's too bad, because each of those little indicators represents an opportunity to refocus your attention on the high-value priorities that can give you better alignment and traction in your relationships and on your priorities," added Sostrin.

"Contradictions are always emerging. Many leaders feel they don't have the resources to address yet another task in their brain's inbox. The busier you get, the faster you move and the less you notice. The less you notice, the fewer opportunities you have to pick up on the subtle signals that something is amiss," he said, and [recommends](#) the following ways to apply mindfulness to learn to follow the contradictions:

- Give yourself permission to take a step back.
- Ask what and why. When you feel the hint of a contradiction, ask yourself: "What is really going on here?" and "Why could this matter?"
- Look for the underlying dynamic. There is always more going on below the surface than you can see. You cannot assume that the people you deal with will explicitly voice what they are feeling.
- Be prepared to feel uncomfortable at first by learning how to notice those contradictions that have been avoided and use them as opportunities for conversation.

While you may not be able to change or influence certain external circumstances, writes Sostrin, following the contradictions is a concrete action that will restore some of your personal resources and eventually enable you to move beyond your dilemma of shrinking capacity and increased demands. When you make it a habit to think this way, you see contradictions sooner and respond more effectively.

Returning to the Friday afternoon example, maybe you save the day with that phone call, and maybe you don't. In either case, you've strengthened the relationship and made it impossible for the customer to act without your influence. Moreover, you've distilled the nagging voices in your head into a concise problem with an obvious solution. In short, by following the contradictions and communicating with others about them, you test your hunches in a proactive, trust-oriented way that sets you apart. And your ability to follow the contradictions will make you an even more present, engaged leader.

