

BREAKING barriers

By Doug Talley

*Breaking the Fear Barrier: How Fear Destroys
Companies from the Inside Out, and What to Do
About It*

By Tom Rieger

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Imagine an organization where everyone, in every department or ministry, works together toward a common goal, and where accomplishing the mission is the driving force. Sounds like a dream, doesn't it? However, in his book, *Breaking the Fear Barrier*, author Tom Rieger says that for that dream to become reality, leaders of an organization must break what he has identified as the foremost paralyzing factor in the marketplace today: the fear barrier.

Fear barriers are internal walls that cause people to feel powerless and result in a culture of paranoia and self-preservation rather than creativity and progress in line with the organization's mission. In response to fear barriers, people create rules designed to ensure their survival and protect any benefits they believe they are entitled to by the organization. What's best for the employee trumps what is best for the organization. The result is an workforce with low morale, ineffective work habits, and an inability to accomplish its mission.

Fear barriers typically manifest themselves in beaurocracy, which can take shape in three different ways, according to Rieger. The characteristics of each are outlined below:

Parochialism

Parochialism reigns when an organization's leaders view the business as their own little silos, redefining success as what is best for that silo, and establish infrastructure designed to protect that silo.

The creation of new rules, standards and policies, under the disguise of quality control, insulates the department or ministry from other departments because they are viewed as threats. Unfortunately, trying to carefully control the outcomes in a way that protects the manager means the department or ministry is not able to seize opportunities or respond to changes. The rules are actually developed by fear and prevent organizational success.

Managers and leaders acting in this manner don't even realize they are doing anything harmful to the organization.

Territorialism

Territorialism occurs when a leader uses fear to control the people and resources inside the silo. These fear tactics may include careful scripting of workers' actions and thoughts, placing a high premium on busywork to keep workers from thinking outside the box, eliminating training to prevent growth and development, restricting information so that workers are solely dependent on the leader, or withholding support if the worker or volunteer takes a risk for the good of the organization. Hopefully it is apparent that although these strategies would certainly ensure the power of the leader, they ultimately undermine the health of the entire organization.

Empire Building

Empire building is an offensive strategy—as opposed to parochialism and territorialism, which are defensive—that is intended to protect one's position by expanding the division or ministry. It can only exist when parochialism and territorialism are present. It needs endemic fear, different views of success, tight control over resources, and lack of shared accountabilities to exist. Organizations in the throes of empire building espouse conflicting visions that lead various silos in competing directions. While it is possible for this approach to be driven by greed, often it is driven by fear, just like parochialism and territorialism.

Rieger provides some specific steps to address each of these fear barriers. He notes that often organizations focus on dealing with the symptoms of fear rather than the systemic culture flaws that cause the symptoms to flourish. For example, rules and procedures are needed in any company or ministry. Problems arise when there are no checks and balances to determine the validity and usefulness of those rules, and attention is instead given to enforcing the rules and consequences for rule breakers. The rules, and their efficacy for accomplishing the mission go unquestioned, and therefore compliance, rather than innovation, takes priority over the success of the organization.

Courage killers must be slain in order for any organization to change its culture so that morale is raised and success becomes more likely. Rieger identifies six courage killers:

Inconsistency: The manager or leader responds to workers or volunteers based on whether or not they offend him or her, so no one knows what to expect.

Hoarding Information: The objective is to control information in order to protect oneself by gaining advantage over a worker or volunteer.

The Blame Game: People are allowed to take risks, but they aren't supported if they fail.

Public Floggings: The leader uses public criticism to demoralize a worker or volunteer when that person makes the leader look bad.

Subjectivity: Performance is evaluated upon the whims of the leader rather than specified outcomes.

Excessive Control: The ability of workers or volunteers is severely restricted and creates a parent-child relationship.

While it takes courage to overcome fear, there are also some strategic steps needed to change the culture.

Craft a mission and vision: Then, continually reinforce that the mission's success is the ultimate barometer of the organization or ministry. Nothing takes precedent over the mission and the vision. They must always be the bottom line. When an organization bases decisions on the mission, courage is fostered and divisiveness is minimized.

Align the entire leadership team to the mission and vision: If a person refuses to align, help him or her find another place to serve in the organization, or help him or her exit the organization. All future members of the leadership team must fully embrace the mission and vision.

Align all departments or ministries with the mission and vision: This involves each department or ministry being able to identify how it contributes to accomplishing the mission and vision.

Being willing to eliminate fear barriers takes a good strategy, hard work, and a great deal of courage, but what a difference it can make in the effectiveness of an organization. Though the process of changing the culture is difficult, it can be liberating and exhilarating, especially when greater success becomes evident.