

IS IT POSSIBLE TO LEAD WHEN YOUR VALUES ARE IN CONFLICT WITH THE ORGANIZATION?

by Glenn Williams



Ninety-five percent of the eighty Board Chairs, CEOs, executives and senior leaders responding to the **LCP Global 2018 Leadership Survey** agreed there is a link between character and performance. We asked them how they responded when there was a conflict between their own personal values and those of the organization?

We summarized their responses into three dominant themes:

1. Resignation

Twenty-seven percent resigned. They believed they were not able to influence a positive change in ethical behavior or could not do it because of how deeply entrenched some of the issues were. In nearly all cases, resignation only came after significant stress due to the efforts of those leaders who had sought to rectify things. What is alarming is, these were not middle managers. Most were part of an executive team or Board.

2. 'Difference' or 'violation'?

Most considered it normal that in many organizations there would be a diversity of values held by those working in them. This would inevitably lead to disagreements on business practices and standards of behavior. It was also widely accepted that seeking a leadership role from within the organization was often influenced by a strong connection with the core values of that business.

The conflict occurs when it becomes clear there is a difference between the values the organization says are important, and when in practical terms they are contradicted (internally or publicly). Even for those who resigned their leadership role believed they could work in organizations where their values differed; but not when there was a clear violation of their own deeply held values.

3. What made the difference to those who remained?

While some leaders decided to leave the organization to explore opportunities more fully aligned with their values, there were those who stayed. They felt they could “work within the conflict”. Paramount to this decision was the belief that they could continue to respectfully model the values that were important to them while influencing a positive change in the culture. However, to succeed in this, it was important they were able to maintain a commitment to a clear set of values they considered to be non-negotiable.

What's the bottom-line?

While it is often possible to influence a change in culture that resonates with your values, this becomes

increasingly difficult as a leader when you can no longer maintain your commitment to the values you consider to be non-negotiable.

Understanding the core beliefs and practices of these values is an integral part of ensuring organizations can bring their internal and external brand into alignment. If unable to achieve this, organizations will less likely be able to attract and retain competent leaders who consider their values something they are unwilling to sacrifice.