

It Goes with the Turf-----Living With The Look , The No- Look and The Reptilian Imperative

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Nothing hurts worse than rejection.

People want to be accepted by their group, their tribe, their peers. They want dignity and status; they want to be “one of the gang.”

Board members and managers often have to make decisions that are counter to the wishes of members and staff. That goes with the turf.

Most members shrug off a “defeat” or a reprimand and move on with their lives, accepting that losing is part of winning and that there’s something to be learned from going down in flames.

But there are members who hold a grudge, who see the Board’s decision as a personal affront to their dignity, their status and what they---who believe themselves to be “the good guys”--- represent. They personalize the decision---that S.O.B. “Mr. X” was out to get me. When that happens, the issues are no longer debated but the merits (or lack thereof) of the decision maker are.

Clubs are a closed circle of people, a tight little group that stays remarkably consistent over time. Everyone knows everyone’s name. People run into each other time and again over the course of weeks, months, years and decades. The angry losers know this and can use it to their advantage.

People with a “beef” understand the need in each of us for acceptance. They understand that direct confrontation and debate over “the issues” can be counter productive since they might well lose in the court of rational discussion. The decision has been made and it won’t be changed no matter what they say or how they argue. Their need is more primitive and vicious. They want revenge---to bruise and injure egos and psyches. And revenge is a meat best eaten cold. Their eyes narrow, their flesh chills, their tongues flick about and the reptilian part of their brain begins to surface.

And the “cold shoulder,” a behavior which sounds so innocuous, can be used to powerful effect in the closed tribal world of clubdom. Its use and its effect are programmed into our DNA. Being cast out from the group, being thrown into the cold, is a recipe for personal disaster. Away from the protective embrace of the group, people can shrivel up and perish both physically and emotionally. Think back to “A Man Without a Country” or “The Scarlet Letter.” Think of being ostracized, banished from the village, cast into

the cold, left to wander defenseless through the hostile countryside. The fear of this banishment is powerfully alive in our genes. The “turkey” who lost the battle with the board understands this psychology and wants to use it as a bludgeon to bruise and injure those who made the tough decision.

Giving the “cold shoulder” takes many forms, but the two most popular are the look and the no-look. The “look” occurs when you enter a room, seek a social encounter and notice your most recent adversary looking at you silently, their features configured for easy interpretation. They don’t like you or your policies or your actions and you’ll be able to see that in the arch of the eyebrow, the set of the lips, the color of their eyes. The reptilian part of your brain reads the signals and understands. The no-look is even more dismissive since it fails to acknowledge your presence. You are beneath recognition, an outcast from “the tribe,” a non-entity. Mr. No-Look visits your table to conspicuously say “hi” to everyone at the table but you. You enter the Mixed Grill after eighteen satisfying holes and one of the tables---filled with “hale and hearty good old boys” who were vocal in their opposition to your and the board’s decision to make the Men’s Grill the Mixed Grill ---fail to acknowledge that you, the president, their old drinking buddy, their beloved “El Presidente” is even in the room. Popularity has a short half-life.

You feel the icy chill of rejection. You feel like an outcast. You consider whether you’d enjoy golfing less at the club and more somewhere else to escape the look and the no-look at this, your club, your home away from home.

The “lookers” and the “no-lookers” have won. You exit and they stay. There is no justice.

Knowing that “the look” and the “no look” are part of our DNA, knowing how to use that knowledge to your advantage and how to defend against its use by others is The Reptilian Imperative. Each of us is armed at the subconscious level with this psychological handgun. If the “losers” draw first, you lose. If you draw first, the “losers” lose. You need to defeat the losers at their own game.

Since you know that you’re the target, you need to prepare yourself for the inevitable. Getting “the look” or the “no-look” will occur if you’re a responsible general manager or board member. Tough decisions have to be made. The un-loyal opposition that lost their battle will be mad. They’ll use their reptilian social skills to their fullest, making every effort to banish you from the community and to cast you out. They hope to soften your position, force you to relent, cry yourself to sleep at night. Buck up and beat them at their own game. How so?

These characters can only win if you look as though you care. If you become a shadow when visiting the club, if you stay at home and drink your beers from the fridge you lose and they win. So-----visit the club more than you did before; make a point of positioning yourself in social locations with all of your friends (the Loyal Loyalists); make sure that you are beaming, positive and vocal; give the Lookers and the No Lookers a smile and a friendly hello whenever you cross their path; open yourself up for discussions with their

“social group” whenever the “lookers” and “no-lookers” are absent; write the would-be ostracizers a personal note saying how much you appreciate their position, how much merit it has but how the decision needed to be made and how it was, collectively, made by the Board for the benefit of all. Kill them with kindness, dignify their positions, confront them with alternatives, sway their buddies, be omnipresent in word, deed and body. They will eventually lose and you, and the forces of Good, will win.

The Club business can be a warm embrace at one moment and a cold night in Siberia at another. Accept that you’ll vacation in both territories at some point in your career as President, Board Member or General Manager. You will receive The Love Look when you cut the dues, and you’ll receive The Look when you raise them. You’ll experience the Join Us Look when the dining room makes money on regular business and you’ll receive The No-Look when you introduce the first ever food and beverage minimum. Accept that the good looks will probably occur during the first month or so of your administrative honeymoon and that the chill will set in once you begin to make the tough decisions on who to reject for membership, who to suspend for drunkenness and when to enforce the dresses only for women in the clubhouse. It’s all part of the joy of leadership. Put on your jacket, thicken your flesh, develop some defensive tactics and remember--- your term will end and you, too, will be allowed to give The Look and the No-Look to the “lucky ones” who replace you on the Board of Directors.