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Chapter 1



It's a Jungle Out There

Don't you hate it when . . .

- Certain workers get away with shirking their responsibilities and even intimidating other employees?
- Management issues strict new rules and regulations that make life miserable for everyone, just because of a few goof-offs?
- Big signs in stores warn against shoplifting or breaking items, with such stern language that you feel uncomfortable just being in the store?
- You have to keep punching the answers to questions and sequences of numbers into the telephone when you're calling a company, only to have the person who finally gets on the phone ask you the same questions and insist that you repeat the same numbers?

These are just a few examples of how misguided leadership can damage a workplace, alienate customers, and otherwise make life annoying, even miserable, for lots of people.

Lately, these problems seem to be getting worse. Lots of ideas for dealing with them have been proposed over the years, but the “solutions” vanish as quickly as they arise because they miss the real issue, which is simple: monkeys are out of place. They’ve shifted to the wrong people’s backs.

Warning: The monkeys I’m talking about aren’t the cute, fun furry creatures you see in zoos. The monkeys I’m referring to are the responsibilities, obligations, and problems everyone deals with every day. They can be distracting, annoying, cumbersome, and pretty stinky! You can’t avoid them; they are part of work and life.

You can easily handle your fair share of normal monkeys, as long as you feel valued and supported. But you can just as easily become overwhelmed when you get stuck shouldering other people’s inappropriate monkeys. Some monkeys simply shouldn’t be your problem. Anger Monkeys, Guilt Monkeys, and Attack Monkeys are just a few of the monkeys people use to shift their burdens to others. And when they do, monkeys start to pile up—on other people’s backs. Every so often, someone like you—someone who works hard and cares about the organization—looks around and notices that other people aren’t so burdened. You start to wonder, “Why do I have to carry their load, too?” You get resentful. You might even feel like there’s no point trying hard anymore because no matter what you do, the monkeys on your back keep multiplying.

Think of an employee—and you probably know one—who performs poorly yet complains loudly. There’s a very good chance his manager will reassign

some of his duties, thinking, “This guy’s not going to do it right anyway, so I might as well have someone else take care of it.” The manager was right in thinking that the employee won’t do the job correctly, but wrong in assigning the task to someone else—someone who now has a monkey she doesn’t deserve. The monkey has been shifted.



Monkeys are the responsibilities, obligations, and problems everyone deals with every day. You can easily handle your share of normal monkeys, but you can just as easily become overwhelmed when you get stuck shouldering other people’s inappropriate monkeys.

How about the angry customer who harangues an unfortunate department store clerk, demanding this and that, letting everyone within earshot know exactly what’s wrong with this crummy place? That customer creates a Discomfort Monkey, which lands squarely on the back of the poor clerk and any customers nearby.

Then there’s the boss who, eager to impress the higher-ups, forces all her employees to really push the “premium membership” on every single customer—even those who obviously don’t want it, who clearly resent being pressured to pay for something they don’t want, and who make their resentment well known. Now you’ve got monkeys on the backs of angry customers as well as hapless employees.

Poorly performing employees, angry customers, and clueless bosses are shifting a lot of monkeys, taking

advantage of the dedicated, mature, caring people who are forced to carry those monkeys and ignoring their superhuman efforts. Yikes! It almost makes you want to stop being good or nice. Shouldn't lazy workers be expected to do their fair share, nasty customers to mend their ways, and misguided bosses to wise up? Aren't they getting a weird kind of reward for their bad behavior?

Why Slackers Go Monkey-Free

It's a sad fact in today's world that negative, poorly performing people tend to get a disproportionate amount of power, attention, and empathy. They continue to behave obnoxiously and unfairly because they're rewarded for doing so. Slacker employees are given less work. Rude customers get immediate attention and endless attempts to placate them. Program-pushing bosses are praised for meeting quotas.

Negative, poorly performing people tend to get a disproportionate amount of power, attention, and empathy. They continue to behave obnoxiously and unfairly because they're rewarded for doing so.

This even happens when a crime occurs. Think about it: the perpetrator is rewarded with much more attention than the victim, and the press and law enforcement officials very carefully use the word *alleged* for fear of unfairly incriminating the suspect. Yet any sordid rumors about the victim will immediately become headline news splashed all over *Entertainment Tonight!*

You can be sure that negative people don't have any monkeys on *their* backs. They don't feel the least bit bad about being slackers or jerks. Why should they, when the rest of us carry their monkeys? It's we who are unhappy, uncomfortable, put out, overworked, frustrated, fearful, and angry. We know the situation is wrong and unfair, but we feel there is nothing we can do to change it.

How to Put Monkeys in Their Place

Fortunately, monkey business doesn't have to be business as usual. I'm going to show how you, as a leader at work and in other aspects of your life, can shift out-of-place monkeys off the backs of the good, hardworking people and onto the backs of the poorly performing, badly behaved people, where they belong. Shifting the monkey may sound like a zookeeper's technique, but it's actually a powerful way to look at leading and living.

By the way, you may have noticed that I often use the terms *good* and *bad* when referring to people. For the purposes of this book, *good* means honest people who try hard, are responsible, and cooperate with others for the benefit of the whole—in other words, the vast majority of people. *Bad* means the opposite: dishonest people who are lazy, unreliable, and self-centered.

I'll show you how to shift the monkey by improving your leadership skills. Don't worry; it won't require mastering complicated technical details or earning advanced degrees. It's simply a matter of changing your thought patterns. Instead of wondering, "How do I protect myself?"—which allows

monkeys to start shifting around—a great leader asks, “How do I protect my good people? How do I make the world a better place?” In so doing, the leader ensures that monkeys stay right where they belong.

Instead of wondering, “How do I protect myself?” a great leader asks, “How do I protect my good people? How do I make the world a better place?”

You won't be able to “fix” people or magically change the world. But you *will* go a long way toward making sure that good people aren't saddled with monkeys that don't belong to them and that bad people are forced to carry their own monkeys. When it comes to liars, criers, and other slackers, you may not change their minds or attitudes, but you *can* change their behavior by becoming a better leader.

And that's what really matters.