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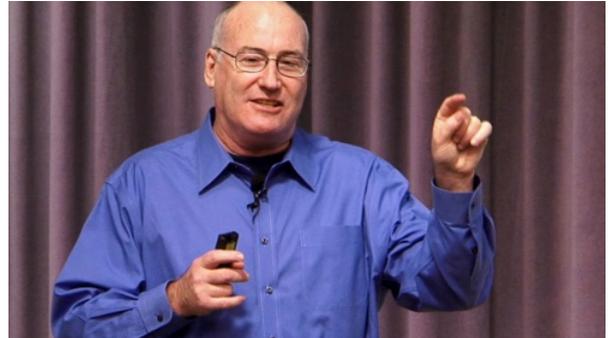
Power Poisoning

Bob Sutton, *Stanford University*

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Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/2567/Power-Poisoning>

According to author Bob Sutton, when someone is placed in a position of power, three things can happen to cause "power poisoning": 1) The individual focuses on their own needs and concerns; 2) The individual focuses little attention on the needs of others; and 3) The individual often acts like the rules don't apply to them. Evidence is also mounting, says Sutton, that the more successful a manager is, the more likely they are to break the rules.



Transcript

Now to make matters worse, it's bad enough there's asymmetry of attention, another thing that makes it difficult to be for leaders to be in tune with their people is something that I call for shorthand 'power poisoning'. There is now a large literature, a couple of hundred studies. One of the main researchers is a woman named Deb Gruenfeld, who's at the Stanford Business School. Some of you may know her. Another one is Dr. Keltner at my alma mater and Tom Byers' alma mater, UC Berkeley. And to give you sort of a shorthand, I could go on and on, but essentially, independently a personality, when you put human beings in power over other human beings, three things happen pretty reliably: one, they focus more on their own needs and concerns; two, they focus less on the needs and concerns of others; and three, they act like the rules don't apply to them. There's also some bits of evidence that are more indirect--this is experimental evidence--that when performance is really great for a CEO or a senior executive, that's when they especially become clueless, self-absorbed and act like the rules don't apply to them, and to get in trouble, since part of my--I believe as a 10-year university professor I should say what I want since it's harder for me to get fired than most people. Let's look what happened to our friend Mark Hurd at HP. I don't know what happened.

Maybe he did not have sex with that woman, to use the Bill Clinton line, but something funny happened with sex and something funny happened--or attraction at least--with the expense report. It happened right at the time where HP was doing absolutely awesome. He was about ready to get a hundred-million-dollar contract. And that's sort of a warning for everybody in this room. When you become successful is when you should be especially wary you're going to turn into an idiot, and there's a lot of evidence to support that.