

# The Paradox of EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

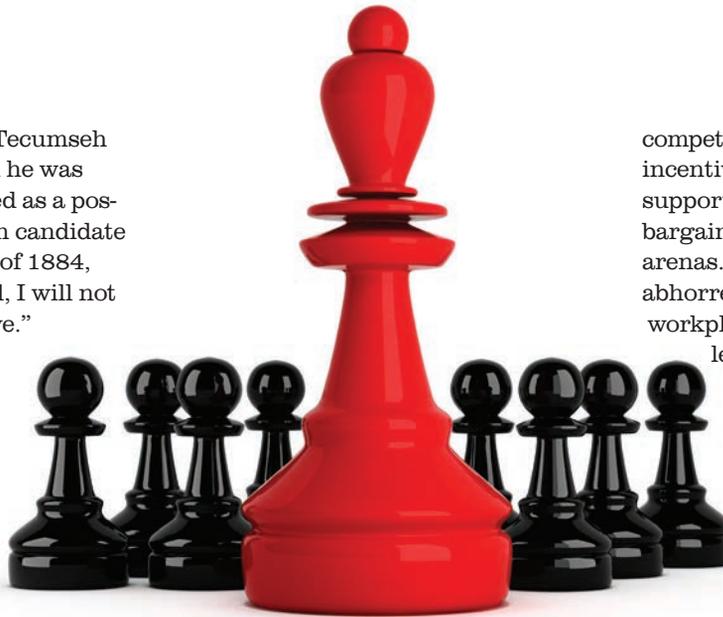
By Ty Hall

**G**eneral William Tecumseh Sherman, when he was being considered as a possible Republican candidate for the Presidential election of 1884, famously said, “If nominated, I will not run; if elected, I will not serve.”

This approach, as shown by research in the *Harvard Business Review*, is the attitude of those in the workplace who rise through the ranks to achieve effective leadership and management skills.

In today's enterprises, leaders aren't gaining power through title but by earning respect from their peers each and every day, reluctantly succeeding to leadership positions. It's the paradox of modern leadership: the people most enthusiastically granted the power of leadership can be reluctant to lead. But every organization must have a leader, so how are the would-be leaders reaching this base? It seems these leaders are characterized by three attributes:

◆ They are exemplary professionals, judged by their colleagues as capable of doing basic work at the highest caliber of quality. They are seen by their peers as capable of leading as one of their own, and are thus trusted to delegate almost boundless decision-making authority.



◆ The reluctant leaders are able to offer autonomy while retaining control. They allow room for other capable people to do their work while ensuring that the company as a whole is heading forward in the right direction. Meanwhile, coworkers do not feel that they are being told what to do, and they feel that the team is working coherently together towards a common goal.

◆ This is the hardest part—these would-be leaders have prodigious, Sherman-like political skills. Essentially, aspiring leaders must build and sustain consensus among their colleagues, make trade-offs between

competing interest groups, and offer incentives to individuals to lend their support, not unlike the lobbying and bargaining which occurs in political arenas. But there is always a constant abhorrence of political behavior in the workplace and a belief that effective leadership is above politics.

Leaders need to be capable of acting politically while appearing apolitical.

This is the paradox of leadership: effective management delights in granting autonomy and doing the fundamental work of the organization without exhibiting the political behavior associated with raw ambition. In turn, another paradox is created. The employee-coworker, an autonomous follower, can only be directed by the reluctant leader.

Today's organizations depend on clever, capable, competent talent, so some kind of paradoxical arrangement must be embraced. Models for initiating and enabling workers' knowledge to combine their energies into unlimited potential can be accomplished. In today's workplace, everyone is capable of effective leadership because everyone is capable of being effective. **N**

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