

Turbo Leadership Systems™

The **TURBO** **Charger**

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To our clients and friends

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Smoke Signals



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President,
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Misunder- standings Add Up



Richard, a design engineer for a heavy equipment manufacturer, told the Leadership Development LAB:

"In 1988, the engineering company I was working for took on a project for the US Army to assist in the disposal of obsolete missile motors. In the first phase of the project, we ignited a test motor, collected emissions, and tracked the plumes' travel. Analysis of the emitted chemicals and plume travel provided a baseline from which to extrapolate environmental impact. "I had just graduated and was struggling with my lack of practical experience. My assignment was to collect emissions from the rocket motor in glass beakers within a mile of the ignition site. I had many questions, but it was made clear that everyone from our firm should appear to 'know everything.'

"Our first rehearsal went fine. Then we conducted an exercise with a smaller missile motor. I didn't hear the prompt to deploy the collection beakers. I wasn't sure what to do. Finally, I broadcast a help message. This was frowned upon!

"After the test, we discussed the details of using a balloon of SF₆ (Sulfur-hexafluoride), a very dense gas, which would hang suspended in the missile exhaust from a small tower. We would burst the balloon at an appointed time, and the SF₆ would provide a tracer for following the missile exhaust plume. We wondered if the rectangular steel tubing used to hold the balloon away from the tower would be strong enough. Someone suggested we run a calculation.

"Brad, another engineer from our company, recalled the steel tubing formula needed in the calculation. Someone questioned Brad's correctness. We could have settled it in 60 seconds if we had an engineering handbook. I volunteered to help with the calculations.

"I punched in the numbers and got a different

answer than Brad. We were sent to a room and told not to come out until we had the discrepancy resolved. Brad had simply made an error on the calculator. When we came back to the meeting, I volunteered, 'Brad pushed the wrong buttons.' My self-doubt was overridden by my success in making an appreciated contribution to the project. I helped answer an important technical question.

"On the day of our final test, we were all very excited. Just before the countdown, I was directed to a location five miles from my collection site. When I arrived, the supervisor told me to report to an obscure trailer and wait there until further notice. The final test proceeded as scheduled. I couldn't participate or even see the test being carried out.

"My earlier report on the calculation offended someone. If I had pushed the wrong button, I would have admitted it just as quickly. I later found out that many of the contractors, for real or imagined reasons, widely held this belief: If an error is made and a person is associated with that error, then management will come after that person. Apparently, some contractors thought that I had thrown Brad under the bus. They decided to send me a little message.

"The lesson I learned from this experience is it's not enough to just say and do the right thing, I must say and do it in the right way. The action I call you to take is think before you act, and think before you engage your mouth. The benefit you will gain is the respect and trust of your associates. You will be invited to the party."

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