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## The Emperor Has No Clothes ... Just Sayin'

We are taught from very young to “go along to get along.” As Maslow demonstrated in the often-shared *Hierarchy of Needs*, after food, shelter and clothing, a **sense of social belonging is the next foundational level of human need**. What does this mean in any group, and how does this play out in the workplace?

Learning from real situations makes it easier to see how the Hans Christian Anderson story of an emperor with no clothes plays out in work situations. You may have seen this concept of Anderson’s tale in other leadership literature.

Take a look:

- An employee is hired into a front line position. The work culture of the group they are hired into has been one of getting the job done, yet there is room for improvement. So, the hiring manager makes sure to assess the job applicants for more than just the task level skills. The new person has innovative approaches to the same tasks. They are good ideas, yet the direct supervisor and others immediately react negatively to this new employee, justifying the reasons things should stay the same. They paint the picture that this person is speaking up too much as a new employee. The new employee begins to feel they are not a good fit.

Did the hiring manager say anything to the direct supervisor about the areas of needed improvement in the workgroup before the new hire came on board? Was the workgroup previously enabled to gate back performance without being addressed? Did anyone say to themselves, “It’s been this way for years, and it is not up to me to straighten it out. After all, I inherited this situation”?

- If we pretend the “emperor has clothes on,” we don’t say anything and we go along with status quo so as not to rock the boat. We get **rewarded for this behavior because we will be included by others**, and we can all vent about how bad it is without owning our own responsibility.

- If we are willing to say, the “emperor has no clothes,” **we risk social alienation**. Even if we deliver things assertively, yet tactfully, we have challenged the status quo. Yet we were hired to make a difference and the higher we move in an organization, the more responsibility we have in courageously confronting situations which are holding us back. We may not always be popular, yet it is authentic and most respectful to do what is right to earn trust.
- We hear a group of peers talking negatively about a person and/or a department. It becomes apparent that the information being provided is from a limited perspective that cannot be validated, yet it is presented as the total truth. Facts that demonstrate other facets of the situation are provided, yet these facts seem to be ignored to justify the growing sentiment of the number “blaming” the challenging situation on a certain segment of the organization. It feels much easier to point the finger elsewhere than for us to own our part in the challenge.
  - If we go along with the voiced opinion of blame, we are echoing that the “emperor has clothes on.” We find **social acceptance** with joining arms against a common enemy, though it is a part of our own organization.
  - If we are willing to follow through in a way that demonstrates that the “emperor has no clothes,” **we risk being treated as an outsider**. Leadership takes courage to confront in a constructive way that may be hard for people to hear ... yet necessary to become the healthiest, most effective and efficient service provider, which is our espoused vision and mission.

*“Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”*

Viktor Frankl