

PROLOGUE

“The elephant in the room” is an American idiom, a popular phrase that implies there is inappropriate or distasteful information or behavior everyone is aware of—the elephant—but no one is talking about it or doing anything about it. As a result, the information or behavior cannot be dealt with, and the elephant cannot be evicted.

The elephant addressed in this book is the poor behaviors, attitudes and dysfunctional actions of individuals and teams that stop people from getting things done. This elephant robs people of excitement they once had for their work. *Stomp the Elephant in the Office* provides tools and methodologies to evict the elephant from the workplace and home. If the elephant is not evicted, the things you need to get done—your strategies—are crushed, money is lost, and lives are damaged.

The elephant need not exist. You can do something, starting now. You can be the one who leads and creates an elephant-free office.

The Proof: Elephant Tracks in Your Organization

“I’m going to use a highly technical term,” a VP recently said. “We suck at executing strategies.”

He and his organization are not alone. In a study by Ernst & Young, 66 percent of corporate strategy is never executed. Some say the failure rate is even higher. Why aren’t things getting done? And what can you do about it?

This is clear: How well people work together and how effective they are at their jobs—your work culture, in other words—determine the success of your organization’s strategies. Everyone knows this, yet few people have the courage to talk about culture—and even fewer have the skill to do anything about it. “Culture” has become an elephant. Those who do create elephant-free workplaces deliver results that turn heads and change the face of their workplaces. How they do it is the essence of *Stomp the Elephant in the Office*.

Maybe some people do not take on their elephants because they do not know what to say or do. After all, no one goes to college and majors in “culture,” and our fathers’ generation labeled such talk as soft.

No wonder most leaders allow the elephant—the often unspoken truth about poor behaviors, attitudes and the inability to execute—to devour and destroy their organizational strategies. Organizations that do not eliminate their elephants harbor toxic cultures that eat every opportunity created.

The successful organizations and leaders identified in this book consider the effectiveness with which people work together as the mother of all strategies.

Rich Crawford is the global president for O-I, the largest glass producer in the world. He helped O-I Latin America to a number-one leadership position in most financial and operational KPIs (key performance indicators) in less than one year. This resulted in all-time record levels of earnings in 2006. Rich is a leader dedicated to creating elephant-free workplaces.

“I came into the Latin American job,” he said, “knowing it would be complicated to manage a region that covered more than an entire continent. I couldn’t leverage my style by being with them personally. As I put together my one-hundred-day plan for execution, this topped my list: immediately build an

even stronger work culture and leadership team. Then, with them establish what is most important for the region.” Rich continued, “I’m an engineer by trade. I’ve always believed that structure follows strategy. But neither one of those work if you don’t have attitude and ownership—and that’s culture.”

How Big Is the Elephant in Your Office?

Take this quiz to determine the size of the big-eared beast in your office. True or False:

1. Your title should be changed to chief firefighter.
2. Organizational meetings are counterproductive and *slow things down*.
3. The top-down leadership strategy is to point out people’s flaws and mistakes.
4. The high point for excitement comes at the end of the day as people walk out the door.
5. Productivity would increase if some colleagues called in sick.
6. There are morons in your organization who need to be told what to do.
7. People roll their eyes when they hear of the company’s goal of being the employer of choice.
8. People suffer joint disease from pointing their fingers when mistakes happen.
9. Your organization has a much greater understanding of what does not work than of what does work.
10. “That’s not my job” is the team’s mantra.

There are other signs that an elephant exists; however, if you answered in the affirmative to any of the above symptoms, things are not getting done around you. The moment your organization stomps this elephant, the people in your organization will become more aligned with their purpose and profitability will surge. The excitement for doing the work you do will rise. Proof of this is contained within these pages.

Who Is the Elephant's Keeper?

Getting the elephant out of the office is today's urgent organizational task. So, who is responsible for the elephant? Fingers have been pointed at your boss, the human resources department, organizational history and bad luck. Yet, like it or not, nearly every person holding this book knows that if you are part of a team, you influence the culture. You are responsible for the size of the elephant in your office. Regardless of our positions, we each influence culture; the elephant is everyone's business.

Stomp the Elephant in the Office is for people who want to lead—who want to make a difference—from where they are. It is for people who harbor the desire for high performance and excellence, who know that bottom-line results are a product of human results.

**These leaders understand
that a healthy, productive culture
is either dying or
being born and nurtured during
every interaction of every day.**

You May Recognize Yourself

You will recognize the leadership tools and methodologies we describe in this book because they are grounded in basic human behaviors. Yet, as we have observed over our combined fifty years of leadership work in various industries, only a small number of people consistently apply and leverage these universal truths.

When they do, they and the teams they work with outperform everyone around them. Those who disregard these truths, either consciously or unconsciously, sabotage their own best efforts and remain mired in mediocrity. Aaron Hilke-mann, CEO of Duncan Aviation in Lincoln, Nebraska, concurs: “The tools Vannoy and Ross share may be common sense, but they are not commonly applied.”

Because these tools have their roots in the choices each person makes every day, those who apply the tools described in *Stomp the Elephant in the Office* deliver greater results, many say immediately.

We and our team at Pathways to Leadership Inc. currently assist people in organizations on six continents—from CEOs to those working on the line; from small teams to Fortune 100 companies; from leaders in education and government to parent groups to those in the nonprofit sector. These people are mastering these tools and becoming better leaders. They are making greater contributions while building extraordinary workplaces, organizations, families and communities.

“By using these tools, our employees have rapidly become better leaders,” said Roger Stortenbecker, chief development officer for Developmental Services of Nebraska Inc., a not-for-profit agency. “Not only are we better able to achieve the organization’s mission to support persons with disabilities, but our employees are also taking these tools and concepts outside the workplace, enriching their families, schools and communities.”

The Following People Will Not Be Interested in This Book

People who favor a *results-at-any-cost* approach will not find this book appealing. While the pressures of the marketplace and Wall Street are real, so are the demands of human consciousness. In this book you will find an organizational approach that satisfies both. Numbers matter. So do the people who generate those numbers.

Results are an effect; people are the cause.

When people function in a way that develops and supports values and productive qualities and behaviors—the essence of culture—something startling happens: Effective decision making and strong execution of strategies are predetermined rather than demanded at the moment of need or after the fact. This values-based approach prepares individuals and organizations for whatever situations they encounter. And people become more excited about the work they do.

This natural, elephant-free approach—a Wellness Culture approach—is a process rather than the one-time or event-oriented strategy so often employed in traditional leadership. The leaders highlighted in this book demonstrate that when they use this method, engagement and motivation—buzzwords of the past decade—are no longer a hoped-for but often unrealized objective. Instead, they are the natural outcome. Organizations free themselves of deterrents, elephants and otherwise, to lead in their industry and in the marketplace.

We are honored to share the stories and best practices of those who are innovating and evolving the way successful leadership gets done.

The Leader Next Door

Many books have been written about the leadership and cultural practices of individuals and companies who are the darlings of Wall Street. These leaders and organizations, some of whom are featured in this book, deserve the recognition.

With *Stomp the Elephant in the Office*, however, we will explore something unique. We have discovered concepts and tools beyond those used by the traditionally celebrated leaders and companies. We examine countless unsung heroes who provide noteworthy leadership within organizations that some of you may not recognize.

These are people who live in neighborhoods like yours, regular people who quietly deliver outstanding results. Some of them work for organizations that are scratching their way into the marketplace. Others work for companies that are under severe financial stress or seem to be in chaos or afloat in a sea of toxicity. Yet these people are making a difference and producing amazing results for themselves and their immediate teams, proving to be an irreplaceable piece of their company's comeback strategy.

For example, in the following pages, you will read about a group within Ford Motor Company that, despite the parent organization's significant and very public struggles, is achieving what no one before them ever has. You will also learn what a select group of leaders at a carton manufacturing company in the Midwest, called Caraustar, is doing that allows them to cut out a piece of the pie in a market dominated by larger corporations.

Finally, some of the leaders highlighted in this book do not work for shareholders; some do not hold traditional positions of power. In the end, though, all of them have refined an approach to their jobs and lives that serves as a model for those who aspire to achieve and deliver their leadership best.

It is time to address the elephant in the office so people, purpose and profitability come into alignment. This book is devoted to giving you proven tools to move your leadership, culture and results forward now.