How to Survive - and Thrive - in a Crappy Culture

Everywhere you turn, you hear about the great cultures at Apple and Zappos and other organizations on those endless "best places to work" lists — and you're urged to do what they do.

But what about organizational cultures that are irreparably poor? How are leaders supposed to function? A recent blog from Dan McCarthy, a former exec at Paychex and Eastman Kodak, addressed this common reality head-on.

"It's *easy* to be a great leader in a company that values leadership, develops leaders, and is full of role model leaders to learn from," he writes. "What about the rest of us? What about those aspiring wannabe leaders [who] happen to work at one of the other organizations that don't make the leadership honor roll? Is it impossible to develop into a great leader, and to *be* a leader, in a bad organization with a crappy culture?"

His answer is *no.* He offers various tips to managers who find themselves in this situation, including:

1. Clarify your non-negotiable leadership principles and stick by them, no matter what. "In a tough economy, [it's possible that you] just can't afford to leave (at least for now)," McCarthy notes. "If you're in a situation like this, you have to ask yourself, 'How much are you willing to sacrifice when it comes to your leadership principles and values?' …If you haven't already, take the time to develop your own list of leadership principles, values, or rules. Then, given your current culture, ask yourself, 'Which ones am I willing to be fired over?'"

2. Establish and maintain your own standards of performance and behavior. "Sure, the company may have set the bar so low that any warm body can meet expectations. High performers can give up and poor performers can settle in. That doesn't mean *your* standards can't be higher — *much* higher. Assess your team using a performance and potential grid and put a plan in place to develop those with potential and gradually weed out the bad apples."

3. "Be the change you want to see in the world." - *Mahatma Gandhi* When it comes to developing and encouraging leadership, actions speak louder than words. Be a safe haven for other aspiring leaders to come out of the closet. In a crappy leadership culture, role model leaders are few and far between. If you're being a leader, people will be lining up at your door looking for advice, coaching, and mentoring.

Read more here.