

Poor leadership – james brudenell



Introduction When I think of leadership, I usually think about it from the aspect of, " Who would I consider to be great leaders and why? ". Some of the names that come to mind immediately are, Abraham Lincoln, Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. They were all great men that had a hand in changing history. I believe there are many leadership lessons to be learned from their examples. Having said that, I also believe looking at the reverse is also beneficial. Leaders come in all shapes and sizes. There are leaders we would consider to be good, like Abraham Lincoln.

Through his leadership the United States stayed united. Others we would consider bad, like Adolf Hitler. He used his leadership skills to promote the genocide of the Jewish people. Both of these leaders had excellent leadership abilities, but what about leaders with poor or bad leadership skills. What can we learn from them? Types of Bad Leadership What are " bad leadership" skills? In 2004, Barbara Kellerman wrote a book entitled, " Bad Leadership: What It Is, How It Happens, Why It Matters". In her book, Barbara suggests bad leadership can be categorized into 7 types.

The 7 types are: Incompetent, Rigid, Intemperate, Callous, Corrupt, Insular and Evil (Kellerman, 2008). In regard to these 7 types, I would like to explore many of them using the example of the aristocrat, James Thomas Brudenell, 7th Earl of Cardigan. James Brudenell was an English officer best known for leading the charge of the light brigade against Russia during the Crimean War in 1854. He was the perfect specimen of what a leader should look like. He was tall and good looking with golden hair and blue eyes. He was also an excellent swordsman and had great courage.

Given these qualities it would appear that James was destined to be a great leader. This was not the case. One of the bad leadership types mentioned by Kellerman is the lack of self-control or being intemperate. I believe James Brudenell fit this description. He was an only son with 7 sisters. Growing up with no brothers to challenge him, he was the strongest in the family. Because he was the only son, he was treated as the most important and influential person in his world (Woodham-Smith, 1953, pg. 6). He was considered by outsiders to be an " egocentric, pampered spoiled brat" (Wallechinsky & Wallace).

James always got what he wanted when he wanted it. This character flaw followed him his whole life. In 1824, at the age of 27, James joined the military. Because of Britain's Purchase System, James moved rapidly up the ranks by purchasing his promotions. At age 28, he became a Lieutenant, at age 29, a captain. Then in 1830, he was promoted twice, first to Major and then to Lieutenant-Colonel (Woodham-Smith, 1953, pg. 44). This abuse of the purchase system showed his lack of self-control, wanting a command of his own as quickly as possible.

Another bad leadership trait is corruption (Kellerman, 2008). Is the leader in question, corrupt? That is, putting self-interest ahead of all else. James demonstrated this trait through out his military career. James' hatred of commoners was legendary. He viewed and treated them like animals. It was his desire to have a regiment comprised solely of aristocrats. All others had to be forced out. In one case James brought trumped up charges against one of his commoner officers for the purpose of obtaining a court-martialed. During the trial, James was asked for his testimony.

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During the cross-examination of his facts it was determined that the charges were false and the officer was acquitted. A second outcome of the trial was that Lieutenant-Colonel James Brudenell was forced to resign his commission (Wallechinsky & Wallace). In 1836, 2 years after his resignation, James was able to leverage his connections and bought his way back into the military. A 3rd trait of a bad leader is callousness. A leader that is callous displays an uncaring and mean spirited attitude toward subordinates as well as others (Kellerman, 2008).

Once James Brudenell was re-commissioned his callous attitude became extreme. His first mission after returning to command, as a Brigadier-General, came during the Crimean War. He was ordered to lead a reconnaissance mission to assess enemy troop strengths and positions. The mission took 15 days. Although his troops never engaged the enemy during this time, James pushed his charges so hard that 80 horses died during the patrol. This shows a severe callousness toward the well being of his regiment.

Adding insult to injury, he also returned from the patrol with no useful information concerning the enemy. He was rewarded for his efforts with a promotion to Major-General (Woodham-Smith, 1953, pp. 150-151). A fourth bad leadership type I would like to explore is incompetence (Kellerman, 2008). James displayed an inability to sustain any effective action. He seemed to have the will to succeed, but not the skill to sustain. James Brudenell was determined to get what he wanted. He willed himself forward and got a command of his own. Because of his lack of skill he lost it.

Then he willed himself again and got another command. His lack of skill resulted in what many would consider a failed reconnaissance mission and yet, through sheer determination he received a promotion for his efforts. It is evident so far that James Brudenell was a bad leader. His incompetence, callousness, lack of self-control and corrupt behavior must have wreaked havoc where ever he was assigned to military duty. In light of his leadership behavior I would like to reflect on some leadership models to determine if his style can be defined beyond that of a bad leader.

Leadership Theories The trait theory of leadership involves 5 major components, Intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity and sociability. Of these 5 components James displayed a determination to success and was full of self-confidence. It is evident from our examples so far that he lacked integrity in his dealings with others and was not inclined to seek out pleasant social relationships (Northouse, 2007, pg. 19). What about intelligence? According to the account of others, James Brudenell was considered to be "unusually stupid" (Woodham-Smith, 1953, pg.). Showing a lack of innate ability in 3 of these 5 major leadership traits, I would consider James to be a poor choice for a leadership position. The skills approach to leadership concludes that leadership is a skill that can be learned. By combining Individual attributes like cognitive ability, motivation and personality with competencies such as problem solving skills and social judgment skills an effective performance outcome can result (Northouse, 2007, pg. 43). James was motivated to succeed, but his lack of areer experience and negative social attitudes were major roadblocks to successful leadership outcomes. It is my opinion, based on James Brudenell's

personality and rigid social behavior, that he would be a poor choice as a leader. I believe the psychodynamic approach to leadership may offer some insights into the personality of James Brudenell. In light of transactional analysis I see evidence of James spending most of his time in the child ego state (Northouse, 2007, pg. 240), specifically the free-child or rebellious child state. This can be seen clearly in the way he was raised and his attitudes toward others.

It is also apparent from his relationships with superiors and subordinates that his ego state (FC) conflicted strongly with theirs. Lord Brudenell's quick temper promoted many quarrels with his officers. He also showed contempt for those in authority as well as subordinates. Desertions under his command sky-rocketed as did the number of court-martials (Wallechinsky & Wallace). James' ego state does not relate well to parent or adult ego states. It appears that when James was confronted with the stress of conflict he would revert to a free-child state.

Because of this tendency, I would not recommend him for any type of leadership position. The style approach to leadership emphasizes the behavior of a leader (Northouse, 2007, pg. 69). Based on previous examples we know James was not relationship oriented. His behavior was strongly bent toward goal accomplishment. Upon review of this model I would describe James' leadership as an extreme authority compliance style. He had no regard for people and saw them as tools to accomplish the task at hand (Northouse, 2007, pg. 73).

The actual charge of the light brigade is a good example of this. James Brudenell gave little regard to the men under his command. During the time leading up to the light brigade charge, James spent most of his time on his private yacht anchored off shore. During the day he would spend his time with his peers conducting battle plans and in the evening he would retire to his boat. When the order was given for the light brigade to charge through the enemy gauntlet and attack, James made sure he was leading the mile and a half charge. No one was permitted to ride ahead of him.

He led the charge as though on parade, keeping his horse at an even, well paced trot. Never once did he look back to rally his troops onward. The murderous enemy artillery fire mowed men and horses down. When the light brigade was within a few hundred yards of the main enemy cannons, the remaining troops broke into a full gallop. James, unable to contain his men, also opened into a full gallop to ensure no one passed him. Upon reaching the enemy cannons he passed between two of them and stopped. He had completed his task. He had led the charge and now it was up to his men to do the fighting.

James turned and rode back to the main British line where he complained about one of the men riding across his flank during the charge, trying to steal his authority. When he was told the man had been killed, James simply retired to his private yacht in the harbor where he had a champagne dinner and went to bed (Woodham-Smith, 1953, pg. 252). There was no remorse or empathy for the lives lost. He accomplished what he was ordered to do.

Based on the "Leadership Grid" this is extreme Authority-Compliance management (Northouse, 2007, pg. 74).

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The situational approach to leadership theorizes that different situations require different kinds of leadership (Northouse, 2007, pg. 91). The general idea of the theory is that the leader should match his style to that of his subordinates in order to be effective. Since James had no concern for his subordinates seeing them as animals, any further discussion on this approach would be fruitless. Contingency theory is concerned with building a framework in which a leader's style can be matched to a situation that needs to be addressed (Northouse, 2007, pg. 113).