Speaking Truth to Power – A Timeless Topic

Sophocles, 442 B.C., Antigone
Shakespeare, 1598, King Henry IV, Part 2
“Don’t shoot the messenger!”
Truth to Power Connotations

• Liberals preaching to conservatives
• Human rights and social justice
• Religious context
Premise...

“A culture of candor in which people are encouraged to speak out to a leadership that is willing to listen is fundamental to sustainable corporate success.”

- James O’Toole
Leadership
Followers

“The leader who thinks he leads and has no one following, is only taking a walk.”

- John Maxwell
Leaders & Followers

What makes a good follower?
What Makes A Good Follower?

- Understand, Support, and Work for the Leader’s Vision
- Help the Leader to Succeed
- Provide Open, Honest and Accurate Information
- Positive and Can Do Attitude
- Learning Attitude

- Dr. Adalat Khan
A Story of Leaders & Followers

“The most important characteristic may be a willingness to tell the truth. In a world of growing complexity, leaders are increasingly dependent on their subordinates for good information, whether the leaders want to hear it or not. Followers who tell the truth, and leaders who listen to it, are an unbeatable combination.”

- Warren Bennis
It’s Not Always Easy.
What Does Truth To Power Mean?

“After a string of box-office flops, Mr. (Samuel) Goldwyn called his staff together and told them: ‘I want you to tell me exactly what's wrong with me and MGM, even if it means losing your job.’”

- Warren Bennis
Discussion Items

1. This whole business of speaking truth to power is not about you; it’s about your duty as a senior public servant.
2. Truth, in this context, is a complicated business.
3. There is a time and a place to speak up.
4. You need to know how to speak up – verbally and in writing. You need to develop your skills in giving tough advice.
5. Finally, you have to learn how to recognize when the argument is over.

- James R. Mitchell - March 27, 2007
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Final Thoughts

1. Trust yourself
2. Consider it your responsibility to share your professional judgment
3. Know your audience
4. Prepare by understanding your point and anticipating any questions you may receive
5. Make your point succinctly
6. Do so in the broader interest, not self interest
7. Persuade – don’t take ceremonial positions
8. Be patient - let the information sink in
9. Better coming from you than from the outside
10. Trust your leadership
“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”

- Dr. Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.