Chapter 2

KNOW YOUR DILEMMA

Because what you are unaware of controls you, and the dilemma has nearly imperceptible ways of constricting your performance and fulfillment on the job

ARE YOU STUCK IN THE MANAGER’S DILEMMA? If you manage people, priorities, and projects, then the chances are good that you have encountered the dilemma at some point or may even be struggling with its consequences right now.

If you are unsure, listen to the way you talk about your own work. The emergence of paradoxical statements like the following is the first sign that the manager’s dilemma is settling into your atmosphere:

“I can’t afford to relax because things are too busy right now.”
“I’m drained, but I have to set an example of perseverance for the team.”
“With so many deadlines and demands, some priorities will have to be sacrificed.”
“It’s too crazy now; I’ll focus better once things settle down.”

From the outside looking in you can see how backward statements like these actually are. If a friend said something like this to you, it would be easy to point out the flaw in their logic and show them how the
undoubtedly counterproductive behaviors stemming from these attitudes will leave them more deeply entrenched in the dilemma. However, when it comes to our own situations, we’re too close and too tangled to maintain this level of objectivity.

When we are stuck in our own dilemma, we somehow start believing that this is how work has to be. Over time, the effects from this way of thinking and working leave us feeling like there is truly no way out. What was easy is now difficult. What was enjoyable is now unsatisfying. What was just an inconvenient headache is now a crisis. What used to give us a sense of purpose now seems unimportant. This is the manager’s dilemma, and when we are stuck within its grasp we struggle to act in ways that align our aspirations, values, and goals.

However, if we learn how to pay attention and read the signs of its approach, we can proactively sense our tilt toward the Danger Zone. For you it may be fatigue from the lack of rest during constant activity, or increasing irritability from waking up tired day after day. For others it could be the frustration from missed workouts, the bit of extra weight from poor diet, the disorientation from excessive travel, the feeling of isolation from that missed social time with family and friends, or the predictable sore throat that always comes after you’ve pushed past your limits for just a little too long. With a clearer understanding of your “signs,” you can anticipate its emergence and come face-to-face with your dilemma.

*It’s More Than Your Everyday Stress:* There is a difference between episodic stress where you might say “I’m feeling maxed out!” and the consistent form of stress caused when you are stuck in the manager’s dilemma. For one, stress increases when you have too much work, too little time, and too few resources to do it. A temporary imbalance of these factors triggers normal stress in the average person. If you are in an industry that has peak periods where your workload fluctuates significantly, then you may even be able to predict spikes in your level of stress.