

## Session Five Reading

### Seven Chronic Problems

*By Stephen Covey*

Acute and chronic are words that are often used in the medical field. Acute pain is pain that flares up quickly. It causes us immediate distress and discomfort. On the other hand, chronic pain is more long-term and constant. It is unrelenting and lingering. Moreover, chronic pain may be difficult to diagnose and/or cure.

In organizations, there can be chronic problems, problems that are long-lasting, persistent, and painful. Chronic organizational problems require much more than “quick-fix” solutions. Solving chronic problems often require time, direction, and commitment from all individuals in the organization. In Principle-Centered Leadership, Covey identified seven chronic problems that can be found universally in organizations:

**Problem 1—no shared vision and values: Either the organization has no mission statement or there is no deep understanding of and commitment to the mission at all levels of the organization.**

Resolving this problem often requires more than an administrator realizes, says Covey. In most cases, organizations have a mission statement but it’s not part of the culture because people did not have a part in creating it. (Check your Supervisory CORE training notes—Managing Results, where mission statements were discussed.)

**Problem 2—no strategic path: Either the strategy is not well developed or it ineffectively expresses the mission statement and/or fails to meet the wants and needs and realities of the stream.**

Covey explains that strategic thinking has changed from a “roadmap” to a “compass” perspective. The reason being the “stream” (environment) is so unpredictable that a map is of little value. People in the organization need compasses fixed on the “true north” of mission, vision, and values so they can react to the ever changing environment. He goes on to explain that the mission and the stream are both important and must be considered in any strategic planning effort.

**Problem 3—Poor alignment: bad alignment between structure and shared values, between vision and systems; the structure and systems of the organization poorly serve and reinforce the strategic paths.**

Covey recommends you ask yourself if every person who comes to the organization is committed to the constitution (mission, values, vision) . . . and does every system and process reflect the constitution? If not, he suggests that you have an alignment problem.

**Problem 4—Wrong style: The management philosophy is either incongruent with the shared vision and values or the style inconsistently embodies the vision and values of the mission statement.**

Covey mentions that you may have to adapt your style to match the vision and the values of the organization. He attributes this “need to adapt” to the great amount of diversity and mobility in our society and our workplaces. The old management styles may no longer reflect the mission, vision, and values of the organization . . . (Ref: Supervisory CORE Training; Situational Leadership, and DiSC /The Platinum Rule)

**Problem 5—Poor skills: style does not match skills, or managers lack the skills they need to use an appropriate style.**

As Covey says, “Even if they have the desire, motivation, and physical ability, they still need improved skills to negotiate effectively.” He states further, “Their style and skills may be suited to only one kind of . . . terrain or weather condition . . .” This problem is easily resolved with training and education. (Here’s an opportunity to develop your leadership team in conjunction with the training program. Contact the program for help in developing your team.)

**Problem 6—Low Trust: staff has low trust, a depleted emotional bank account, and that low trust results in closed communication, little problem-solving and poor cooperation and teamwork.**

Covey describes this problem as a “chicken or the egg” dilemma, advising that if you attempt to work on the trust issues without working on the other problems you will only exacerbate the situation. He defines trust as “the quality of the relationship between people” and suggests the best way to build trust is to work on the mission statement and alignment issues. (those of you who had the section on Core Variables in your supervisory training will recall being instructed to look close to the center (mission, goal and sometimes structures) when encountering problems with climate/morale, the external environment, and sometimes the structures themselves.) He cautions against keeping a closed management style when initiating your mission and alignment efforts since people won’t trust your words or motives if you’ve not changed your approach.

Covey feels that trust is more than integrity; “it also connotes competence.” He gives the example of an honest doctor . . . a doctor who must also be competent if you are going to trust her or him.

**Problem 7—No integrity: values do not equal habits; there is no correlation between what I value and believe and what I do.**

When Covey detects one of the seven chronic problems in an organization where managers blame everyone or everything else, he suggests they look in the mirror and ask themselves only one question,

“Do I have integrity?” In other words, have I acted in ways that demonstrate my values . . . in ways that demonstrate commitment to the mission . . . in ways that build the emotional bank account . . . ? Have I adapted my style to the rigors and demands of the new stream?

**How would you rate your organization?**

<b>Covey's Problem</b>	<b>Not a Problem</b>	<b>Needs work</b>	<b>Major Overhaul</b>
No Shared Vision and Values			
No Strategic Path			
Poor Alignment			
Wrong (Management) Style			
Poor Skills			
Low Trust			
No Integrity			