



STOP IT OR I'LL BURY YOU IN A BOX

✧ · by [Carlann Fergusson](#) · in [Authentic Leadership](#), [Coaching Corner](#), [Emotionally Intelligent Leadership](#), [Leadership Lessons Learned](#), [Leadership vs. Management](#), [Leading & Developing Other Leaders](#), [Organizational Health](#), [Professional Development](#), [Values-Based Leadership](#) ·

Two weeks ago, I left 25 years of serving as a corporate leader and I was contemplating what type of client I wanted to work with in my new consulting business.

A clear answer immediately echoed in my head – “No Victims”

No More Victims

How many times had I heard a leader say things like this:

- “I can’t do that.”
- “My boss won’t let me.”
- “They will never go for that.”

How many times have you been in a training program and heard a leader say:

“If my boss hasn’t been trained on this then I can’t do it.”

My reply: I say STOP IT!!

A colleague shared this [MadTV Bob Newhart](#) video and I think it applies to corporate leadership.

<https://youtu.be/Ow0lr63y4Mw>

How did we create all these victims? I say *create* because I think back to a seminar I took with the late [Dr. W. Edwards Deming](#), quality guru. He was talking to us about our poor performing employees and he asked

“Did you hire them that way or did you make them that way?”

A brilliant question!

Manufacturing Victim Leaders

I think we hired a few victim leaders, but in reality, the rest we have created. How we created these was eluding me until I attended a conference where Dave Logan, co-author of [Tribal Leadership](#) was a keynote speaker. What he said resonated with me.

To roughly summarize, he says this:

- The leaders who believe “*I’m Great*” intentionally or unintentionally communicate to others “*I’m Great – And You’re Not.*”
- The leaders who report to these “I’m Great” bosses have a choice – either fight for their right to also be great or succumb to being an apathetic victim who believes “*My Life Sucks.*”

The later can be seen throughout business in leaders who just work for a paycheck. After awhile they give up hope that the boss will be replaced by a “We’re Great” leader who allows space for all to be great.

The leader spiral into helplessness and create a group of employees below him or her whose lives also suck.

These employees go about their work *trying* to get things done, but end up producing very little because they lose their passion. The employees lose, the leaders lose and the companies lose.

Stop It!

So how do we stop this victim leadership? I’ve been lucky to have many “*We’re Great*” leaders but when I haven’t I turn my energy to being a buffer for my team. You don’t have to pass down the frustration you are experiencing with your boss.

You don’t need your boss’s permission to be a “*We’re Great*” leader and unleash the power already inherent in each employee that works for you.

If you have managers reporting to you, even better, because you can role model and hold your managers accountable to being “*We’re Great*” leaders too. The whole team under this leadership will achieve incredible personal and company results.

Pick Your Box

As buffer leaders we hope that our boss will see there is no threat from letting others be great. When this doesn’t happen and the “I’m Great” boss continues to make his or her direct reports powerless, you get to choose your box to be buried alive in:

The Box with Chains

The leader resigns to the fact that his/her life under this boss does indeed suck, but at least they keep earning a paycheck.

The Box with the Bully

The leader continues to exert their right to be a great leader and the boss continues to overtly or covertly bully the leader to succumb to his or her power.

The Box with the Trap Door

The leader concludes that it is time to find another boss, either inside or outside of the organization to relieve the sparring with the boss and the exhaustion from constantly serving as a buffer to the team.

In any of these boxes you may decide that for the sake of the team, your peers or the company you need to let the boss's boss know what is going on. If your peers have already chosen the box with chains it may be a lonely meeting as they may perceive the risk too high.

If your boss's boss is a "We're Great" leader your chances of success are much higher. If your boss's boss is an "I'm Great" leader than your probability of success dwindles but at least you can have compassion for your boss who may be acting out from the box of chains he or she is in.

Stop the Abused-Becoming-the-Abusers Syndrome

Unfortunately, I think that the tough economy has created more victim leaders who are willing to take the box with the chains. The victim leaders have lost the energy to serve as buffers to their teams.

This then leads to entire departments of victims whose lives suck. The air is stale at best and the workplace resembles the walking dead. Whichever box you choose will depend on how you look at the risks associated with each option.

But let's be clear, if you stay with the "I'm Great" boss, you are being buried alive so conserve your air.

The box with the trap door may be the only one with a path to fresh air.

- **What do you think makes "I'm Great" bosses more common?**
- **How have you found ways to move a boss from "I'm Great" to "We're Great"?**
- **What other advice do you have for leaders not to fall into the victim response?**

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