

# ON THE BUBBLE

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The BRIGHTON GROUP

Partners Inc.

The Brighton Group/OI Partners Inc. is a locally owned and managed consulting firm specializing in career and organizational transition services. In-depth, one-on-one consulting is the core of our distinctive approach.

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If a leader's performance has caused major concerns and puts them "on the bubble," what is the course of action? Does it make sense to consider changing a leader's behavior instead of transitioning the leader and recruiting a replacement? The costs of retaining a coach to facilitate the leadership changes are certainly less expensive than the recruiting process. However, coaching doesn't always work, and the hidden costs of the leader's unchanged behavior can also escalate. Coach or replace? Which path is the better to take?

Our experience assisting client organizations with this dilemma has surfaced four considerations to making the coach or replace decision.

**1. How widespread is the concern that has surfaced?** Highly visible leaders can easily broadcast both constructive and limiting behaviors. When these limiting behaviors need to be addressed, other people's perception can become an obstacle to making a successful behavioral change. If the perceptions of a leader's limiting behavior are both widespread and rooted in the minds of those with whom s/he works, then the path to change becomes more difficult or insurmountable.

**2. Is the behavior that needs to change habitual or stress related?** Counterproductive leadership habits that have been successfully used by a leader in previous work experiences are more difficult to change. Barring a personal epiphany brought on by a crisis, most leaders don't give up these habits easily. However, limiting stress-related behavior can often be contained or extinguished with coaching. Often times stress produces emotionally charged responses that can, over time, be positively managed with less emotion.

**3. If judgment is the concern, is this a coachable situation?** Leadership judgment is a significant and an intangible quality that is critical to a leader's success. Judgment calls can arise within moments and have impacts that can last for days or years. Not all judgments are perfect and they add up. When judgment calls accumulate on the negative side, there is usually not a coaching solution. New leadership best addresses poor judgment.

**4. Is there a climate of support for the change that is required?** Making any kind of real change in behavior requires a sustainable climate of support. There is little room for impatient conversations, premature audits for change, or abandonment of commitment or support for a leader because the expected change has not happen immediately. It can take several months (sometimes more for more complex areas of competency development) before any real change becomes evident, let alone permanently implanted into a leader's mind and behavior. Real change takes time.



So what are the alternatives? The first consideration most likely is to take corrective action if it is feasible. Would the organization and individual be best served though coaching to effect change? However, when a leader is on the bubble and one or more of these concerns surface in the process of considering what action to take, the most effective outcome may be to assist this individual in finding a new role inside or outside of the organization.

*"A better human experience...for a better business outcome"*

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