

Mutiny On The Leadership

By Tom Brown



Officer Of The Court: This court is now in session.

Judge: High Prosecutor, please proceed.

High Prosecutor: You are Tom Brown, are you not? And you are a midshipman aboard the H.M.S. Leadership?

Brown: Nothing more.

High Prosecutor: And you understand that you are charged with mutiny, by advocating the removal of the captain of industry aboard the very ship on which you served. Indeed, you attempted to get all the other members of the crew to abandon not only your captain, but all captains of industry on all corporate ships. Is that not so?

Brown: It is.

High Prosecutor: Then you do not deny that you disapprove of the current code of conduct for organizational leaders, that — in fact — you seek to rebel against this code which has enriched so many a stockholder for, lo, at least 10 years or more. You do not deny this, do you, sir?

Brown: I do not.

High Prosecutor: Mr. Brown, do you realize that if this jury and this court find you guilty of mutiny, you will be haunted for the rest of your life, that you will be tagged fairly and appropriately as a renegade, a rebellious rabble-rouser who acknowledged immense corporate profits and yet tried to besmirch the men and women who made all that money possible?

Brown: I do.

High Prosecutor: Then, sir, I ask you before all who sit in this courtroom: how do you plead?

Brown: Not... guilty.... With the deepest level of respect for this court —not guilty!

High Prosecutor: I would ask the Officer Of The Court to silence the outcries among the spectators — or remove these people. This is a court of judgment, and management mutiny is a high crime!

Officer Of The Court: Members of the audience will restrain themselves, or they will be removed!

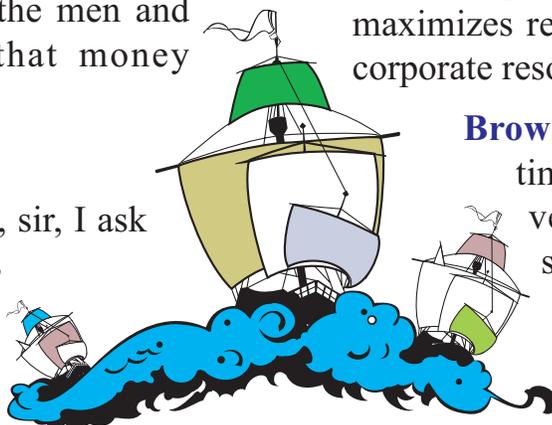
High Prosecutor: Mr. Brown, how can you admit to all that you have conceded so far and plead “not guilty”? This does not follow. This makes no sense.

Brown: Sir, again, with respect, to mutiny is, in my view, to go against the good of all, not the privileged few. It is true that the so-called leaders of the current generation of corporate executives have created profits that are, well, without comparison in any time in history. But at what cost?

Today’s leaders captain slow-sinking ships.

High Prosecutor: Costs, may I remind you, are almost universally down in the corporate world: no self-respecting captain of industry would dare manage today without the lowest costs, the fewest heads, the tightest turnaround times... and... and..., in sum, captains today focus exclusively on creating a corporate cost structure that maximizes returns on that most precious corporate resource, capital!

Brown: Precisely. Yet, for some time, I have sensed on my own vessel and others a growing sense of fatigue among the crew and even among frequent passengers, the



most loyal and best customers. It's as if things are getting done, but no one cares about doing them — and, thus, no one appreciates the half-hearted, half-done efforts for which they are paying so dearly. Mediocrity, not excellence, has become today's gold standard.

High Prosecutor: A mere management midshipman should not fret over such trivial factors in such a robust business climate. You know as well as any that a bulging bottom line served your ship and many others very well. And may I remind you that the pensions and investment portfolios of you, your shipmates, and your passengers have all grown in direct proportion to this rising tide of wealth.

Brown: This is true — but only for some. Most people, even in developed countries, live paycheck-to-paycheck, on minimal wages. And as our world has become closer-knit because of the broadcast media and The Internet, more of those who don't have big pensions and huge savings are seething with expanding discontent, so much so that...

High Prosecutor: Oh, then it's socialism that you want! No captains of industry at all! No profits for those who have the capital and the will to risk it by investing in the great business ships of our time. Your view is an old one, and it is intellectually bankrupt, I might add.

Brown: I never said that, sir! You presume much too much! I argue for expanded free enterprise in all parts of the world!

High Prosecutor: Oh, is that your line? What, then, might I

presume? What, then, is your view?

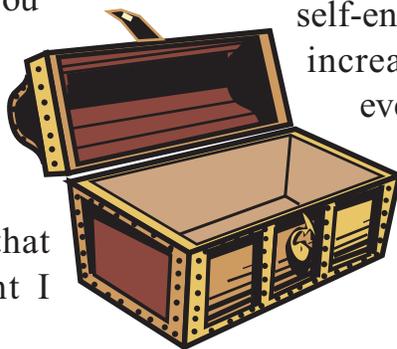
Brown: The H.M.S. Leadership is but one commercial vessel; there are many, as we all know. The names of these ships are branding themselves, or so it seems, in every port on every continent. This can mean only one thing: as a planet, as a world, we are coming together in ways that have never happened before. We are all, as a human population, inter-linked in geo-commercial, geopolitical, and geocentric ways. Nationalism is a point of pride, but it is becoming increasingly less a point of reality...

Judge: Members of the audience will restrain themselves, or they will be removed! Silence! Now! Don't make me use this gavel again!

Brown: I do not say such things to cut into personal sensitivities; I am instead merely pointing out that, as in all times before us, these times are changing and in quite observable ways.

High Prosecutor: Mr. Brown, you are charged with mutiny against the captain of the H.M.S. Leadership and, by extension, all captains of all commercial ships. Please confine your remarks to defending yourself against that charge.

Brown: But I am. I am! When we have leaders — in business as well as in government — who operate for the egregious benefit of a limited few, such self-enriching policies and practices are increasingly observable to everyone, everywhere. And crude profit-making and power-hoarding may be tolerated for awhile, but these actions will sooner or later strangle the very people who



make profit and power possible. Our interconnected world makes the actions of any captain increasingly visible. It will also make mass discontent increasingly visible.

High Prosecutor: Mr. Brown, I am not amused and I am not enlightened by your philosophizing. Just look what the corporate world is reaping these days!

Are you losing it? Are you mad? We live in very, very good times!

Brown: I do not deny that much profit is being reaped, as you put it. But man reaps not only from what he sows, but from what he doesn't sow.

High Prosecutor: I'm afraid you have lost me.

Brown: When leaders promote profits and forget spirit, when they reduce headcount and dismiss community, when they export jobs and import hostility, when they boost productivity yet ignore civility...

High Prosecutor: Your point?

Brown: Today's leaders have forgotten that enterprises like the H.M.S. Leadership were built on a novel, new idea that caught the imagination of workers who rallied an innovation into reality. And, because the new idea helped or pleased a wide arc of people, society backed the fledgling enterprise individually, as consumers, and collectively, as investors. When today's leaders operate only to extract all that they can reap while turning their back on investing in new ideas and the people who can bring those ideas to life, then...

High Prosecutor: Then?

Brown: Then anger rises in proportion to the sliding sense of morale. And... society will sooner

or later revolt against the limits of that selfishness.

High Prosecutor: Please excuse my smile; could you perhaps be a bit more blunt?

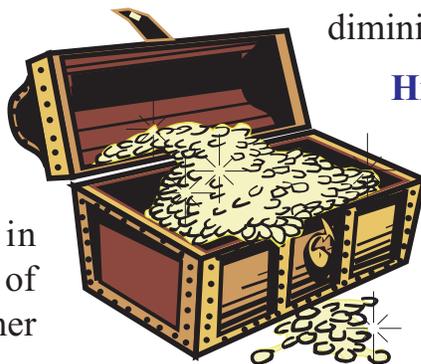
Brown: While I am now on trial for what you allege is "mutiny," I dare say that there are many people in many organizations who have lost faith in their captains, who are sighing much more than they are working, and who are giving far less to their jobs and to their ships of business or ships of state than they otherwise would. And I would say that this collective sighing gives way, from time to time, to forms of rage that are ugly and counter-productive whether they turn violent or not.

High Prosecutor: Officer Of The Court, this courtroom must be quiet!

Brown: Ladies and gentlemen, all of you in this courtroom, please! When the H.M.S. Leadership crossed into the 21st Century, we passed a milestone in time; our clocks have changed but not our attitudes. We are, all of us, shirking our historical mandate if we do not pull together to discover the ideas that will steer us toward the future. What should the 21st Century City look like? How should the 21st Century University operate? Who is needed to create the 21st Century Corporation? Leaders who are focused only on reaping all that they can from the present diminish us as a society.

High Prosecutor: That's enough of that, Mr. Brown. It's obvious that no leader today measures up to your impossible standards.

Brown: *That's not true!* They



may not make the headlines, but those who are discovering new ways to live and work are leaders. Those who understand that rallying associates, not bullying them, are leaders. Those who have the courage to scrape together the resources they need to nudge their new idea into reality are leaders. Those who stand fast and don't cave into the pressure of the status quo are leaders. And those who struggle to improve the common good, to make a genuine contribution to society, are leaders.

High Prosecutor: May it please the court, Mr. Brown, in my judgment, has just changed his plea to guilty. There is no ship in the corporate fleet with such a captain at the helm... there is no captain today who measures up to Mr. Brown's standards. To the extent he stands by his own words, he is guilty of mutiny. He is guilty.... I cannot say this more strongly: he's guilty!

Judge: Do you now wish to plead guilty?

Brown: If mutiny is synonymous with discovery, enthusiasm, resourcefulness,

resolve, and contribution, then guilty I am. Yet I stand firm in asserting that a model of leadership based on commanding, controlling, allocating, exploiting, and profiteering is not one which will survive — or should! — in the 21st Century. We must fight such forms of leadership. There is a better way. And anyone in this courtroom can become this new kind of leader if he or she will only move each day in new directions.

High Prosecutor: Officer Of The Court, I cannot hear over all this noise. Officer Of The Court! Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, there is nothing more to say. What is your verdict?



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