

## **The Us vs. Them Disease: There is a Cure** **By Chuck Mache**

Recognize any of these scenarios?

- A. Inner company departments are at odds with each other with both “camps” embattled in finger pointing. They’re in denial over their dependence on each other for not just their growth and quality goals, but their very survival.
- B. Management and staff are unable to operate in unison, causing a complete abandonment of the mission statement that hangs in well positioned places throughout the office. The single minded purpose intended to unify the company, has been forgotten in the throws of unhealthy conflict and discontentment.
- C. Sales and Marketing, two completely different disciplines: sales, very tactical by design while marketing must be strategic, research based, developmental in the branding and sales tools they provide to the army. Yet, while completely dependent on each other, there often exists a dysfunctional relationship.

Examples such as these are a result of the classic “Us vs. Them” disease that rips at the very fiber of infected companies. Don’t get me wrong. I’m not talking about much needed creative tension between divisions, departments and people. That’s the kind of tension that flushes out the best decisions, strategies, and ideas. I’m not talking about healthy, above board, engaging and spirited disagreement that results in well thought out decisions. Take a look at this example:

In the early nineties, I was a senior executive in a large national company. The company’s success was heavily reliant on the real estate industry and particularly in the California market. At that time, home sales were on the decline much like they are in our current market. While we were the leader in the market, an ongoing battle for share against our largest competitor was about to move from intense to fierce – a typical occurrence when the pie gets smaller. To take matters to the extreme, that same competitor had just dropped their price in an effort to grab some fast market share.

As a result, the “Us vs. Them” virus was making preparation to catapult to a full on disease. The field was pointing a finger directly at me and the executive team, impatiently waiting for a response to the “scud” that had been fired directly at our precious share. The numbers people, rightfully claiming tremendous margin erosion should we react in kind, were pointing a finger directly at me and the sales management team and challenging our ability to sell our way through it. The marketing department was countering with a scenario that showed plummeting market share should we make no change. You get the picture.

The President and I met for hours on a solution that would not only restore us on our growth path, but simultaneously kill the “Us vs. Them” virus. A few days later we had an offsite meeting unlike any in the past. He invited department team members (not just management) from sales, marketing, service, underwriting, accounting, IT, and human resources. This was the directive: Everyone agrees on a strategy to protect our market share, and the meeting doesn’t

end until that happens. After some solid facilitation, the walls came down and two days later, the team had reached agreement on a product. What followed was the destruction of the “Us vs. Them” virus because “Them” had been destroyed. The team was once again unified and all our energy translated into a successful fight for market share growth.

### **Leaders: get right in the middle of your company**

In this example, I was lucky. I had an event occur that exposed the “Us vs. Them” virus at its early stages. That made it easy to kill it before it became a disease that permeated throughout the company. The real challenge is to recognize the virus and its cunning and sometimes baffling subtleties before it spreads. I’ve seen this disease permeate not because of a threatening market change such as the above example, but because of leadership that thinks they have their hand on the pulse of the company. Usually, they are too reliant on their first line of management for important feedback. Or their own personal agenda and skill set renders them incapable of detecting and correcting the ‘Us vs. Them’ disease. Often times, it’s just not on their radar and when it is, they have no idea how to correct it. That is weak leadership.

I’ve mirrored some of the best leaders in the world and used tactics like these:

- Frequent focus groups between President and staff members designed to get honest input on tough issues.
- A regular one on one meeting between President and individual well respected staff members on any subject the staffer wants to talk about.
- Q & A sessions in a series of “town meetings” that is an open forum to ask anything about the company.
- Visibility through walking around and engaging in conversations while frequently visiting offices and departments. Just to get a “read” on things.

The best leaders have their hand on the pulse of the people. The best leaders help their management team get better by providing them valuable insight and feedback. The best leaders are honest, authentic, and consistent. They have strong moral fiber, are ready to deal with the hard issues, and are champions for positive and healthy change. The best leaders make tough decisions, always have empathy for others, and are able to align the company goals with the companies real thinking. The best leaders shatter the birth of any “Us vs. Them” thinking. That’s why the best leaders are not THEM.

#### ***About the Author:***

Chuck Mache, President of Chuck Mache Communications, has more than 25 years experience in selling, managing, building and leading sales organizations and companies both regionally and internationally. He is a speaker, consultant and coach. His Brian Tracy-endorsed book, [\*The Four Kinds of Sales People: Your Personal Path to Breakthrough Achievement\*](#) explores key breakthrough strategies and behavioral insights designed for those wanting to take their lives and selling game to the next level. Sign up for Chuck’s complimentary monthly newsletter "Chuck Talk" at [www.ChuckMache.com/nb](http://www.ChuckMache.com/nb) . "Chuck Talk with Chuck Mache" is also a new radio segment premiering 9/22 on the top-rated **Entrepreneur Magazine Radio Show** and may be heard live or via archive at [www.EntrepreneurTalkRadio.com](http://www.EntrepreneurTalkRadio.com)