

## A Bone of Contention with Leadership Vacuums

*By Tucker Miller (AVP of Client Consulting for ELI, Inc.)*

"They haven't had a leader for the last two years," my client explained. As a new manager assigned to work with this formerly "leader-less" team, she continued to describe various tensions and interpersonal conflicts within the group, as well as numerous examples of ways that over the time this particular group had redefined key work conditions and expectations: they devised their own system of flexible work schedules, prolonged service delivery times without agreement from their clients, and collectively demanded the physical relocation of a member of the group that the majority found to be "too loud."

In short order, Cesar assessed the situation: the dogs did not view the owner as their pack leader. The owner was the source of love and affection, but not leadership – and these dogs needed a leader. And here's the interesting thing – in the absence of the owner stepping up to be the leader as the dogs expected or needed him to be, the two dogs alternated to fill the leadership role and that was what caused so much tension and anxiety. Neither dog was viewed by the other as the leader, and neither was comfortable being the leader –

Having seen numerous examples of Cesar's work, it is very evident that leadership is so necessary for stability, that even the most uncertain, the most tentative, the most insecure will at varying times step in to fill any leadership void.

Now, I refuse to go on record saying that people are like dogs. But I have seen the same phenomenon in the workplace time and time again: people need and want to be led.

This is important to realize because the so-called lack of leadership" problem is not one that can be simply repaired by assigning a strong manager to the group. More often, though, I see a desire by businesses to quickly fix a situation by assigning a new manager and giving her marching orders to immediately clean up the department. Relying excessively on positional power, that manager may be as unstable as any of the other quasi-leaders in the group. There has to be a process of dismantling the prior leadership structures and establishing trust in the new leader in order for that leader to be effective in a way that allows everyone on the team to relax and know that they are in good hands – even if those hands ultimately will help a person move on to another situation where they might be more successful.

Managers, wanting to be successful leaders, need remember a very few key guidelines – here, extrapolated from Cesar Millan's vernacular – all consistent with what we profess foundational to Building a Civil Treatment Workplace:

1. Lead by example – in both words and actions
2. Be consistent
3. Be professional
4. Praise successes
5. Remain calm and assertive when correcting and coaching for improvement
6. Build productive and trusting relationships
7. Expand your perspective to look at situations and problems from multiple points of view

**The result: a leader that allows everyone to relax and focus on their best work.  
That's a bone worth chasing after.**