

Point At The Mulberry But Curse The Locust Tree



指桑罵槐

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Strategy 26

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Under hurtful accusations often lies a weak case.

Chinese Proverb

A lie told by one, becomes truth when told by hundreds.

Chinese Proverb

To discipline, control, or warn others whose status or position excludes them from direct confrontation, use analogy and innuendo. Without directly naming names, those accused cannot retaliate without revealing their complicity.

Spring and Autumn Period China

Duke Jing of Qi appointed *Sima Rangchu* as General of the Army to lead the soldiers against Qin.

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Sima said, *"I was formerly lowly and menial. If my lord pulls me out from my village and places me above the high officials, the officers and troops will not be submissive and the 'Hundred Surnames' will not believe in me. 19*

Since I am insignificant and my authority light, I would like to have one of my lord's favored ministers, someone whom the state respects, as supervisor of the army. Then it will be possible."

Duke Jing consented and appointed *Zhuang Jia* as supervisor. Sima met with *Zhuang Jia* and they agreed that they would begin the march at midday the next day. Sima went on ahead to the army camp where he gave orders to prepare for the next day's departure. He also ordered his guards to place a water clock in the parade grounds.

The next day *Zhuang*, who had always been arrogant and aristocratic, assumed that since Sima was already at the army camp and preparations were underway, it was not urgent for him to be there. His friends and relatives from all around gathered to detain him with drinks and entertainment. By midday *Zhuang* had still not arrived so Sima gave orders for the army to depart. By evening *Zhuang* had finally caught up with the army.

Sima asked, *"How is it that you arrived after the appointed time?"*

Zhuang acknowledged his fault saying, *"High officials and relatives saw this simple one off, and thus I was detained."*

Sima said, *"On the day a general receives the mandate of command, he forgets his home; when he enters the army and takes control of the soldiers, he forgets his loved ones; when he takes hold of the drum sticks and urgently beats the drum, he forgets himself."*

At present, enemy states have already deeply invaded our lands, while within the state there is unrest and movement. Officers and soldiers lie brutally cut down and exposed on the borders."

19 An expression used to designate the Chinese people. Legend has it that 100 tribes immigrated to China in the 3rd millennial B.C. and are considered the ancestors of the modern Chinese.

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The fate of the entire population hangs upon you, so what do you mean by being seen off?"

Zhuang was speechless. Sima then summoned the provost marshal and inquired, *"What is the army's law regarding those who arrive after the appointed time?"*

He replied, *"They should be beheaded!"*

Zhuang was terrified and sent a messenger racing back to the capital to have the duke issue an immediate pardon. But before the messenger returned with the pardon, Zhuang had already been executed.

Thereafter the officials and nobles were all terrified of Sima and no one dared hesitate in following his orders

Han Dynasty China

After *Gaozu* had become emperor he invested many of his followers. One day, while he was strolling along the balcony of his palace in Luoyang, he noticed several ministers milling about below speaking in hushed tones.

"What are they talking about?" he asked his advisor, *Zhang Liang*.

"Your majesty does not know?" replied Zhang, *"They are plotting a revolt."*

"But peace and order have just been restored to the empire. Why should they be planning a revolt?"

"When your majesty rose from among the common people, it was through these men that you seized control of the empire. You have become the Son of Heaven, but those whom you have invested have all been close friends from the old days, while you have had your enemies of former times executed.

Now these officers of your army, reckoning up the merits they have won, believe that there is not sufficient land in the whole empire to invest them all. So, some of them fear they will not receive their just allotment,

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while others tremble, lest, falling under suspicion for some error of their past, they be condemned to execution. Therefore they gather together in this way and plot rebellion."

"What should I do?" asked the emperor.

"Among all your followers whom do you dislike the most?" inquired Zhang Liang.

"Yong Chi and I are ancient enemies," replied the emperor. "Many times in the past he has brought me trouble and shame. I would like to have killed him, but because his merit is great, I have not had the heart."

"You must hurry and invest Yong Chi before anyone else, and make known what you have done to your other followers. When they see Yong Chi has been invested, they will all feel assured of their own rewards," said Zhang Liang.

The emperor agreed and held a feast to bestow Yang Chi with lands and titles.

When the other ministers left the banquet they said to each other happily, "If even Yong Chi can become a marquis, the rest of us have nothing to worry about!"

Han Dynasty China

In 195 B.C. *Gaozu*, the founder of the Han Dynasty, died. His wife, the Dowager Empress Lu, thereupon set about seizing power for herself and her clan. First, she had two princes assassinated, a third driven to suicide, and their kingdoms handed over to members of her own family.

The empress also disposed of numerous ministers and advisors, not to mention all the former concubines of her late husband. Then she placed an infant on the throne claiming it to be the son of Gaozu when in fact she had stolen the infant and had the mother executed to cover the affair.

The emperor's family line of Liu was in danger of being eclipsed by the newly powerful Lu clan. One marquis of the imperial line, Liu Chang,

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was embittered that his family was effectively ousted from holding position at court, and was determined to resist the empress's designs.

Once, at a banquet held at the palace, the empress appointed Liu Chang to act as master of wine. This was meant as an insult, being asked to serve at a banquet, but Liu Chang did not show any offense. He asked the empress, *"Since I come from a family of generals, I would like to direct the dispensing of wine in accordance with the rules of the army."*

The empress, unaware of the ramifications, gave her consent. When the banquet was at its height Liu Chang poured wine for the empress and asked permission to sing a folk song that he learned as a child. The empress gave her permission and Liu Chang began to recite:

*Deep we plough and thick we sow the seed,
We set out the little plants where they will have room to grow.
Whatever comes up that is not from our seed,
We hoe it out and throw it away!*

The empress was outraged at the obvious allusion, but she could say nothing without admitting her resemblance to it. Later a member of the entourage became drunk and slipped away from the party without seeking permission from the empress.

Liu Chang followed the man and drew his sword and slew him. Liu Chang returned to the party carrying the severed head and said to the startled guests, *"Some man tried to desert the banquet! In accordance with army regulations I have duly carried out the penalty of execution!"*

The empress and her courtiers were completely dumbfounded, but since the empress had given permission to conduct the service according to military protocol, no one could find fault with Liu's actions.

Thereafter Liu Chang was treated with great deference by the court. Shortly after empress Lu passed away, the Liu clan revolted and in keeping with the song wiped out the entire Lu clan, except for one princess who was married to a marquis in a distant province.

Summary

A rule of leadership states to always reward in public but to criticize in private. However, there are times when others need to see the possible consequences of their behavior by making an example of someone.

