

# How to lead when you hate the order you're carrying out



You've got your marching orders from up top ... and they're not good. In fact, you believe that the logic simply isn't there, and you're not the only one who feels that way. Yet you've been tasked with making things work.

How do you enforce an ill-advised layoff, or a dubious business decision, and still maintain your sanity and credibility?

It's times like these that you must make an image of strength work for you. Whether you're weak or stoic in carrying the order out, it's got to get done, so the pragmatic choice is to be strong. While your people may resent you as they struggle with what's happening, you'll gain their long-term respect by gently shutting down any arguments before they begin. You'll want to be on guard against people trying to bargain their way out of the inevitable; have a speech prepared, one that leaves little room for follow-up.

The next hurdle is to defeat the temptation to divorce yourself from those you're enforcing for so that you remain likeable. Ineffectual leaders will say, "Look, this was not my idea and I don't like it, but..." Again, this makes you seem weak, a puppet of higher powers. Your best bet is to recite the facts of the situation as if they can't be traced to any one person, entity or philosophy. Instead of saying "They've made the decision," try "A decision was made." Instead of "I feel bad, and I'm sorry" lean on "This is unfortunate, and no one is happy." This way, you're not blaming anyone while subtly telegraphing to others that your personal course of action may have been very different.

Finally, there's your conscience to deal with. Remind yourself that it's up to everyone who works for your organization to accept the good faith deal they struck on their first day: To survive and thrive, the company agreed to pay for the efforts of its staff and to make the decisions it must to keep going. Your compliance in doing what needs to be done is part of what makes the company go on so that more people can benefit in the end.