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## Leaders can please – or ask more of us

Not everyone liked Marty Linsky. During last week's Innovative Ideas in Leadership Development workshop hosted by the Kansas Leadership Center, a participant half-seriously described Marty, one of the presenters, as "mean." Someone else used the word "combative." Marty even playfully called himself a "scumbag."

I liked him, actually. I thought of him more as uncomfortably honest.

And that's where more of our leadership, if we were honest, should be. We're too busy giving people what they want rather than giving them what they need to grow and to develop.

Consider our civic debate about a smoking ban.

Leadership should be shouting that second-hand smoke is dangerous.

But we're debating rights rather than what's best for the public good.

Ed O'Malley, the charter president and chief executive of the Kansas Leadership Center, described leadership as difficult, especially when it forces people to examine who they really are.

The workshop was the first public outreach effort for the center, created last year with a \$30 million grant from the Kansas Health Foundation.

"Our goal was to stimulate some really deep thinking for people engaged in this work," O'Malley said.

The center found the right person in mean ol' Marty, a faculty member at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, a former assistant attorney general of Massachusetts and a former editorial writer and reporter for the Boston Globe.

Organizers paired Marty with co-presenter David Chrislip, whom most of the group did seem to like, to offer a contrasting style.

David, an author and consultant of national renown on collaborative leadership, spoke more softly. Gently.

Marty, though, challenged the 150 of us there with some stretching, abstract questions.

He drilled into what he called our defaults, the little moral judgments we assign to uncomfortable topics.

"We often find a rationale," Marty said, "for taking the easy road.

"Leadership," Marty said, "is about disappointing your own people at a rate that they can absorb."

Leadership is an act of conservation and loss, he said.

"It ties into change," Marty said. "You're asking people to give up something. But you're also asking them to identify what's so important to them that it needs to be preserved. When I hear 'win, win,' I know nothing really important is going to happen."

Too often in our professional lives, he said, we sacrifice our very purpose in pursuit of being liked. The people we work with use this to undermine us.

Does this sound like the leadership we as a community often settle for?

Shouldn't we seek more often what we need to hear rather than what we want to hear?

Marty did that, and I still like him just fine.

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