

# "Don't Let The Midgets Kill You!"

August 12, 2020

We sat at a table sharing more than just dinner. Ted had come to town to speak for the organization I worked for. He patiently listened as I relayed the problems that were going on in our area between myself and a person who reported to me. The politics had gotten tough. My time was coming to an end. At one point he looked at me and said, "Don't let the midgets kill you."

I didn't know what he meant at first. I knew he wasn't talking about the physical height of anyone. He was talking about the small thinkers who were pushing me out. As he explained what he meant, I realized that he was right. The "midgets" had been punching me in the gut and I had been bending down to swat them away; and they were winning.

There will always be "midgets." Small minded people who think only about their immediate surroundings. They can't see the big picture, have no vision except for their own small pathway, and they live to attack those who threaten their comfort zone. They love the safe and secure and never raise up to big challenges. They can't reach that high.

But what Ted was really saying was, "you're a giant and you don't know it. Stop acting like you're a "midget" and act like the giant you are." I love Ted Johnson. He is singularly the most affirming person I have ever met. He encouraged me when no one else did and saw in me what I couldn't see in myself.

Why was I even playing with the "midgets?" Why had I allowed them into my sphere of relationships? This wasn't about them anymore; it was about me. My problem. My insecurity. My self-image.

I took Ted's advice seriously. In my next opportunity, I vowed to only work with other giants. I inherited a couple of "midgets" and moved them out quickly (including one whose mother called to berate me for firing her son, which only reinforced my decision). Most importantly, the group I surrounded myself with were giants in their own right. They reached for big things and more often than not they succeeded.

There will always be "midgets" in life and leaders must learn to deal with them. More importantly, great leaders must learn how to build a team with other

giants. The great leaders lead leaders. Giants leading giants. This is what distinguished Abraham Lincoln most. He led the biggest giants of his day – strong leaders who had opposed him for the Republican nomination for President – and made them members of his Cabinet. He led them through the most difficult times the nation had ever faced, and they followed him.

In reality, you can't let the "midgets" near you. Lincoln was killed by a "midget" who was able to get close enough to shoot him. It wasn't another giant who killed him, it was a two-bit actor who was allowed to sneak up to the President's box and shoot him. It wasn't Robert E. Lee. It wasn't a leading member of the opposing political party. It was an actor.

How many "midgets" can you have on your team? None. They suck time and energy away from the giants and if they ever get power, they join with other "midgets" to kill the vision.

They are inevitably a cancer in the organization that will ultimately destroy it from within. Why? Because instead of working toward a big vision, they are only capable of descending to smallness. They trade in gossip, their commerce is weakness and their pleasure is the narcissism that comes from being the center of a very small circle. They cause the organization to focus on their world of small instead of the big vision and they cost the organization time and money it can't afford. Get rid of them.

Here is the big principle: *The people you choose to NOT have on your team are as important as the people you choose TO have on your team.*

Lincoln had to deal with a small-minded member of his team. General George McClellan was appointed commander of the Union Army in Virginia but instead of attacking the southern forces he timidly disobeyed Lincoln because he thought the President was unfit for the job.

Lincoln waited too long to fire McClellan and that delay prolonged the war and cost thousands of lives. After he finally relieved McClellan of his duties, the embittered General became the Democrat Party nominee for President in 1864, losing to Abraham Lincoln. But there was a high cost of not dealing with this insubordinate obfuscator sooner. A prolonged war and thousands of lives were lost because Lincoln did not relieve McClellan of his duties when he should have.

I look back and I think of the man who tried to push me around when I first

moved to a new city. He was a small-minded bully. But by this time, I was ready to apply Ted's advice. I stood up to him, let him – and his significant donation – leave the organization and I didn't look back.

It was a tough decision. He had been a supporter for many years and in some ways had been the face of the organization in this town. He thought I couldn't survive without him. Small-minded bullies always have some way of making themselves seem invaluable. They want you to feel that you can't live without them. They want you to believe they are the key to your success, when in reality they are killing you with every little cut.

As I went to various communities in the area and spoke to various stakeholders, I was often asked if this person was still involved. I had to tell them that no, he was no longer part of the organization. At first, I worried that they would back away now that he was gone, but the opposite was true. They repeatedly told me, "ok, now we'll get involved." They were waiting for someone to stand up to him; to move him out. The way he treated me was the same way he treated everyone, and they were waiting for someone to move the organization in a different direction.

This guy thought I couldn't survive without him. I didn't care. I didn't have room on the team for "midget-bullies" and I was glad to see him go. Years after I left that job, I got a call one day to tell me that he had been arrested and was in jail. I felt sorry for him and his family. It was a terrible thing and I grieved for everyone involved. I wish it hadn't happened.

I was glad that I had taken Ted's advice and that I had not allowed him on the team.

Incredibly, that scenario with a minimum of changed details has happened multiple times in my career. Midget-bullies whom I didn't let on the team wound up in jail. And in each case, I was glad that I had not let them on the team. Let me repeat the principle.

**The people you choose to NOT have on your team are as important as the people you choose TO have on your team.**

Giants can still get killed. Great leaders still get knocked down by other great leaders, other giants and that is part of leadership. It is far better to be in the battle with other giants, reaching and striving for a great vision, even at the risk of being killed by another giant, than it is to be killed by a thousand small

cuts from a group of “midgets.”

After firing McClellan, President Lincoln found General Ulysses S. Grant. Grant was also a giant, and the two giants shared a mutual respect and understanding of one another. Each man knew how to build a team with other giants. They stood for a great vision, a superior cause and won a costly victory. They were two giants who followed each other, trusted each other and depended upon each other.

Giants standing tall, shoulder to shoulder, singularly focused on victory, together they won a great war.

Are there “midgets” on your team?

If so, why?

What is the cost of not dealing with them?

Who are the “giants” on your team?

Are you leading them?

One last thing. Abraham Lincoln was one of the greatest leaders of all time. If he struggled to fire his problem person, then don't be too hard on yourself if you are struggling to deal with yours.

Know Who You Are And Be It!