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## Rolling Blackouts In The Executive Suite

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Most CEOs spend more time in the dark than they like to admit. What is worse is when they don't know they're in the dark. Few employees give the CEO complete and honest feedback. Many advisors and consultants don't have all the information the CEO needs. Few others, like customers and non-customers, ever get to talk with the CEO. All senior officers have to be somewhat insulated in order to use their time most effectively. But the ever-present danger is that these decision makers are operating in the dark, suffering their own personal rolling blackouts.

Senior officers enjoy prestige, power, high compensation, and great perks. In other words these guys make the big bucks! Why, because they make decisions. Consistently making good decisions can be one of the most difficult and valuable tasks humans perform. And in business, the decisions of these leaders drive shareholder value. The direction they drive it, whether up or down, depends for the most part on the quality of information developed for these leaders.

### Every Decision Involves Risk

Once a human is faced with a decision, whether they chose to face the decision on their own or if it was assigned to them by others or by events, they are at risk of making a mistake. Even a decision to 'do nothing' is now a decision with a risk attached. Some people get a little testy when they find themselves on the spot and realize they cannot get out of their situation without making a decision and risking a mistake. Add some heavy-duty consequences and tight time constraints and you've got the makings for world-class stress. Senior officers like the risk, they like winning, and they loathe losing.

The board expects senior officers to make good decisions, sometimes very tough decisions, which increase shareholder value. They may make occasional mistakes but they had better be small mistakes and the executive's overall batting average better be good. The better the batting average the farther and faster they move up the ladder and the greater their reward.

### Good Decisions Require Good Information

Einstein said, "A problem well defined is a problem half solved." Senior officers will tell you that making the decision isn't usually as tough as getting the right information necessary for a good decision. The need for quality information, gathered quickly, is behind the exploding popularity of organizational and individual surveys. Surveys help define your problems and improve your decisions.

The key elements for getting the right information with surveys are:

1. Anonymity to encourage participation and candor,
2. The right questions tailored to the survey purpose,
3. Ease of use,
4. Frequency to spot and monitor trends,
5. Fast compilation of survey results,
6. Flexibility in administration,
7. Survey feedback to respondents.

*He who asks is a fool  
for five minutes,  
But he who does not ask  
remains a fool forever.*  
Old Chinese Proverb

### Good Decisions Drive The Bottom Line

Done right, individual and organizational surveys develop some of the most valuable leadership information available to senior officers. Done right, surveys get the executives out of the dark and into the 'know', which will improve their decision-making batting average. Better information leads to better decisions, which leads to better bottom lines.

As a bonus, *employee* surveys boost employee morale because employees know they have a voice in the organization and they appreciate the benefit of better organizational decisions. *Customer satisfaction* surveys tell you what your customers like, dislike and want, but they also can generate customer goodwill. Surveying *non-customers* can introduce your firm to prospects and give you insight on how you might

make them customers. *360° individual feedback* surveys help develop top managers and again raise employee morale because they give the employee a voice. All of these bonuses drive the bottom line up!

**Still In The Dark?**

The regular use of surveys will keep the lights on for senior officers, improving their decision making and helping to increase shareholder value. As Mark Twain observed, “Supposing is good, but finding out is better.” If your executive suite is suffering rolling blackouts, then find out about surveys. Plug in to all of your key constituencies. If you don’t turn the lights on, your board may soon be asking you to turn them off!

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