



## **David and Organizational Change**

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### **Abstract**

While many organizations are becoming increasingly aware of the necessity of innovation in the workplace for competitive purposes, not all of them fully understand how to go about creating a corporate culture that is open to and maximizes on opportunities for positive change. In some cases, management may unintentionally ignore a great opportunity to innovate because they are blindsided by what they know from previous experience. Newcomers and associates at all levels can be a valuable resource in providing an outside perspective on new strategies, and modern businesses would do well to foster an environment where such information can be freely shared. This article explores the Biblical story of David versus Goliath and applies the lessons learned therein to present-day organizations to show the necessity of creating such an environment.

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### **Introduction**

While the Biblical story of David versus Goliath is a wonderful example of overcoming all odds through faith in the power of God, 1 Samuel 17 is applicable to numerous specific modern situations as well. From a business perspective, this narrative helps individuals in any workplace capacity, whether manager or associate, to understand how corporate transformation is possible and why such a transformation is often necessary to ensure the continued success of the organization as a whole. Even one person is able to make a difference, regardless of his or her current position, which changes the business or even the entire industry in a positive way.

## **1 Samuel 17 from an Organizational Standpoint**

In this story, David represents a low-ranking associate, perhaps someone new to the business or tenured but in a non-managerial role. Unfortunately, in many modern businesses, a person in this position is given little if any ability to drive change within the organization. Any suggestion of doing things differently or trying something new is often scorned, and the individual is informed by upper management that this is not how things are or have ever been done before—and this is exactly the point.

Saul's army is the core management of the organization. They do things the way they have done them in the past and believe it is possible to defeat Goliath only by utilizing someone with equal power and stature. While it at first seems logical that you will need equal or greater strength than your enemy in order to defeat them, leaders should remain aware that there could be an easier way that they simply haven't thought of yet.

Saul is the CEO within a modern organization. He wants what is best for his company but is unable to see beyond what the core management has been doing for years. He is unable to come up with any unique solutions because he, like everyone else, remains focused on factors such as Goliath's (a competing business') size, stature, accomplishments, armor, and weapons. He tells David "you are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a young man, and he has been a warrior from his youth." As we find out, Saul is focused on the wrong factors.

When David introduces a new strategy, Saul chooses to allow him to proceed because there are no other options. We can be sure that if Israel had access to their own champion similar to that of their opponent's, David would not have been given a chance. This is what typically happens within organizations; if none of the typical decision-makers are able to solve the problem, then and only then are they willing to hear a lowly associate's perspective. Sadly, this severely limits the capabilities of many firms today. In the story, Goliath is defeated because the other army was caught off-guard; David's alternative thinking and complete certainty that his plan would work are exactly what made this happen.

## **Status of David's Brothers and the Rest of Saul's Army upon Meeting David**

David's brothers and the rest of Saul's army had plenty of experience in battle and possessed technical knowledge of battle strategy. For these reasons, they were trusted and respected by Saul. In comparison to David, they all had much greater physical strength, and they were used to utilizing heavy armor for protection and wielding swords for defense. Even so, when seeing Goliath, "Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified." For these reasons, they thought it would be completely impossible for David to defeat Goliath. After all, he was there to be a messenger only; his task was to deliver food and bring back news to his father. As we know, they were very wrong and he was about to engage in an act that changed everything for them all.

### **Specific Disruptions David Introduced**

David presented multiple disruptions to Saul's army. First, he decided to inquire about something he had (as they thought) no business knowing about or participating in. This is similar to managers denying access to certain important projects simply based on lack of prior experience. He also spoke with Saul directly—the equivalent of a first-year associate speaking to the CEO directly about a project, which is often unheard of. Similarly, the army must have thought this was very unusual, and perhaps they were even angered by it.

A key difference that David exhibited was that he had much stronger faith than anyone else in his abilities backed by God's power. The army was in no way confident that they could defeat Goliath whereas David never hesitated and knew exactly what needed to be done. He told Saul with confidence that he had experience defeating lions and bears that had come after his flock—certainly a great feat, but still very different from engaging an expert in battle. His confidence encouraged Saul to allow David to move forward into battle. This is similar to modern associates pitching their ideas to management. A clear plan of action backed by a passion to help the company succeed, as well as a clear picture of what will happen if the plan is not followed, must be presented. Managers should consider how individuals with a different background can bring a different perspective to the table. This alternate perspective could be exactly what they need to defeat a competitor.

David's choices prior to going to battle Goliath are very interesting. He chose to go without heavy armor and with only his slingshot, as opposed to heavy swords. This must have seemed insane to Saul and the army, as these tools were necessary for protection and defense in the ways they were accustomed to. However, David exhibited strategic thinking at this point by introducing a never-before-attempted approach to battle. Without the armor, he was more agile and given the slingshot, he was able to hit Goliath directly in the head from afar. He would not have been able to do this had he approached the situation like everyone else. As leadership authority Gary Hamel noted, it is crucial to keep in mind that "to create new wealth, a company must be willing to abandon its current strategy, at least in part, before it goes toes up." David is successful in doing so.

### **Results of these Disruptions**

Had David approached this situation like anyone else at the time, he would have been easily defeated given his stature and lack of physical strength. Only by thinking strategically was he able to kill Goliath with a weapon no one else thought of using, which made Goliath's stature and power worthless against him. Too often there is an easy solution to a problem that is simply never thought of or even ignored in favor of doing things as they have always been done. It is also important to note that after defeating Goliath, David used Goliath's own sword to cut his head off. This act can be seen as very symbolic of defeating a modern competitor with their own technology. Once this had been done, the entire Philistine army fell apart and was terrified. Then they were easily defeated by the Israelite army. Businesses must always strive to be a

disruptor. By doing so, it is very possible to defeat established competitors at their own game. David made a name for himself against all odds in this scenario and earned the respect of those with much greater experience than he had.

### **How This Applies to Modern Corporations**

Modern corporations can learn so much from this story. First, it is obvious that management needs to be open to the ideas of anyone willing to provide them. If associates have no channel for sharing their ideas or if their ideas are frequently ignored, there will be no progress within the organization. Next, they need to realize that a hierarchical structure to decision making often squashes innovative efforts. Manager-developed plans are not necessarily the best, and associate-developed ones are not necessarily the worst. Official titles have to be ignored, at least when it comes to disruptive ideas. If someone, regardless of how new or inexperienced, shows a clear plan of action and is very confident in the results, you should trust that person and give him or her a chance. Also, businesses must realize that everyone can learn from creative thinking. This is not a matter of who gets recognition for a successful project; it is a matter of the entire organization succeeding and moving competitively into the future. Hamel noted that successful companies are “capable of self-renewal, [they are] organizations that are capable of continually reinventing themselves and the industries in which they compete.” Also, corporate change expert Cheese said, “to encourage innovation, companies have to be able to collaborate, work across boundaries within and between organizations, to bring together disparate experiences and perspectives, and to properly empower people to come up with ideas and make change happen.”

### **Conclusion**

What should be clear by now is that we need to allow the Davids within every organization to express their plans and opinions, and help them to move forward to test hypotheses. You will never know if you don't try, and even if the plan does not work out as expected, this is simply a learning opportunity. Businesses need to give the Davids a chance by allowing direct access to decision-makers instead of supporting a hierarchy where several higher-ups would need to approve prior to implementation. Lastly, we must create an environment where alternative thinking is encouraged by properly training for innovation and rewarding innovative efforts. The more creative thinking is allowed and encouraged, the greater the institutional learning within the company can be. The more the company learns, the better they will be positioned for success against competitors—even Goliaths.

**About the Author**

Stephanie Banus is currently pursuing her Masters in Business Administration at Regent University and holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in English from Radford University. She is a licensed Insurance Agent at GEICO and has years of experience in education, training, and employee development. She enjoys exploring Biblical connections to the workplace and innovative methods that can be applied to a variety of industries. Contact the author at [stepba1@mail.regent.edu](mailto:stepba1@mail.regent.edu).

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