



Disappointment with Organizational Leaders: Flight, Fight or Silence?

I only recently learned about the economist Albert Hirschman, and then only at his passing (*The Economist*, 22 December 2012, p.106). Mr. Hirschman's most famous work exposed the effects of people responding to disappointment. Either they:

1. **Exit**, what many leaders call *voting with their feet*, or
2. **Stay put and complain**, hoping to outwait the current leadership regime.

My sole argument with this comes from the many organizations I know where I observe a third response:

3. **Stay put and go silent**, concluding that is hopeless to do anything.

If these three options are the menu of how most people respond to disappointment, we are left with troubling and declining results.

EXIT – Creative participation is lost.

STAY & COMPLAIN - Creative participation turns destructive.

STAY & REMAIN SILENT – Creative participation goes dormant.

Each of us is in charge of how we respond to disappointment. We are not in control of our ideals dinged, our wishes unheeded, our ideas ignored or our wounds inflicted. What we can choose is what we do next. We can continue to create or lapse into flight, fight or silence. If we choose any of the destructive options, we not only bring further damage to ourselves, we open wide the door for other, vulnerable people to experience disappointment—perhaps even disappointment in us.

Rather than exit, one can choose to be called and sent. It is not such a big deal if vocation is not attached to location for the disappointed person. Rather than complain, one can keep offering constructive critique with offers to help and a commitment to flexibility. It is not such a big deal if it is not a control issue for the disappointed person. Rather than be silent, one can keep devoting themselves to service—especially in informal ways. It is not such a big deal if winning is no longer the issue for the disappointed person.

A grand freedom can be found when one does not place their satisfaction or self-worth in organizational approval or recognition from one's higher ups. This is true for the highest up ones of us since we all answer to someone—board, spouse, children. Rather, we go about growing in and using our gifts. One always has a useful and productive outlet for gifts, and the commitment to keep using them even when disappointed is what builds ultimately satisfying fulfillment.

-mark I vincent

[Subscribe to Depth Perception](#)