

CALLING AND THE CORNER OFFICE

On the false choice between conviction and consequence — and what it actually costs to refuse it.

By Reginald M. Holiday, Executive Coach

Every executive I have ever coached arrives, eventually, at the same door. It does not look the same for everyone — a board meeting where the numbers say one thing and conscience says another, a hiring decision, a merger, a moment where the fastest path to the result runs through a compromise they said they'd never make. Underneath the specifics, it is always the same door: the moment a leader is told, implicitly or explicitly, that they can have their integrity or their impact. Not both.

I do not believe that. Thirty years of sitting in rooms where budgets get set, boards get managed, and communities get served or failed have only hardened that conviction. The choice between conviction and consequence is not a real choice. It is a story we have been told so often we have stopped questioning whether it is true.

Here is where the story comes from. Somewhere along the way, most of us absorbed a version of leadership that treats character and competence as competing resources — that the leader most willing to bend gets the result, and the leader who holds the line pays for it. It is a plausible story; it has enough true cases to feel like law. I have watched leaders who compromised get the promotion, and leaders who held their ground get passed over. Look only at the short frame, and the story checks out.

But I have watched the long frame too — what a decision produces in an organization and in a leader, often for years afterward. The leaders who trade conviction for a short-term win almost never actually get to keep the win. They get the deal and lose the trust that would have closed the next three. They get the corner office and arrive there having quietly agreed to become someone they do not recognize.

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The cost of refusing the false choice is real, and I will not pretend otherwise. Holding a conviction under pressure sometimes does cost you the deal, the relationship, the seat at the table. Integrity is not a strategy for avoiding loss — it is a commitment to a different definition of what counts as loss in the first place.

This is why I built On Target the way I did — identity work before skill work, character before strategy. A leader who has already named their calling and their non-negotiables does not discover, mid-decision, what they're made of. They already know. The decision gets easier, not because the stakes are lower, but because they are no longer negotiating with themselves at the same time they are negotiating with everyone else.

The corner office was never actually the prize. The prize was always the leader who was allowed to sit in it without having traded away the thing that made them worth putting there. Calling and the corner office are not in competition. Decide which one you are building your life around first. Everything else gets easier — not easy. Easier.

If This Is the Tension You're Navigating

This is the work at the center of every engagement I lead — Executive, Kingdom CEO, or Nonprofit.

reggie@ontargetcoachingconsulting.com · ontargetcoachingconsulting.com · 336-501-5828

Where Calling Meets the Corner Office.™