

What Is the Greatest Flaw of Accounting Firm Leaders?

Koltin Consulting Group CEO Allan Koltin talked about this flaw during his keynote speech on leadership at Bridging the Gap 2024.

Jason Bramwell | Jul. 24, 2024

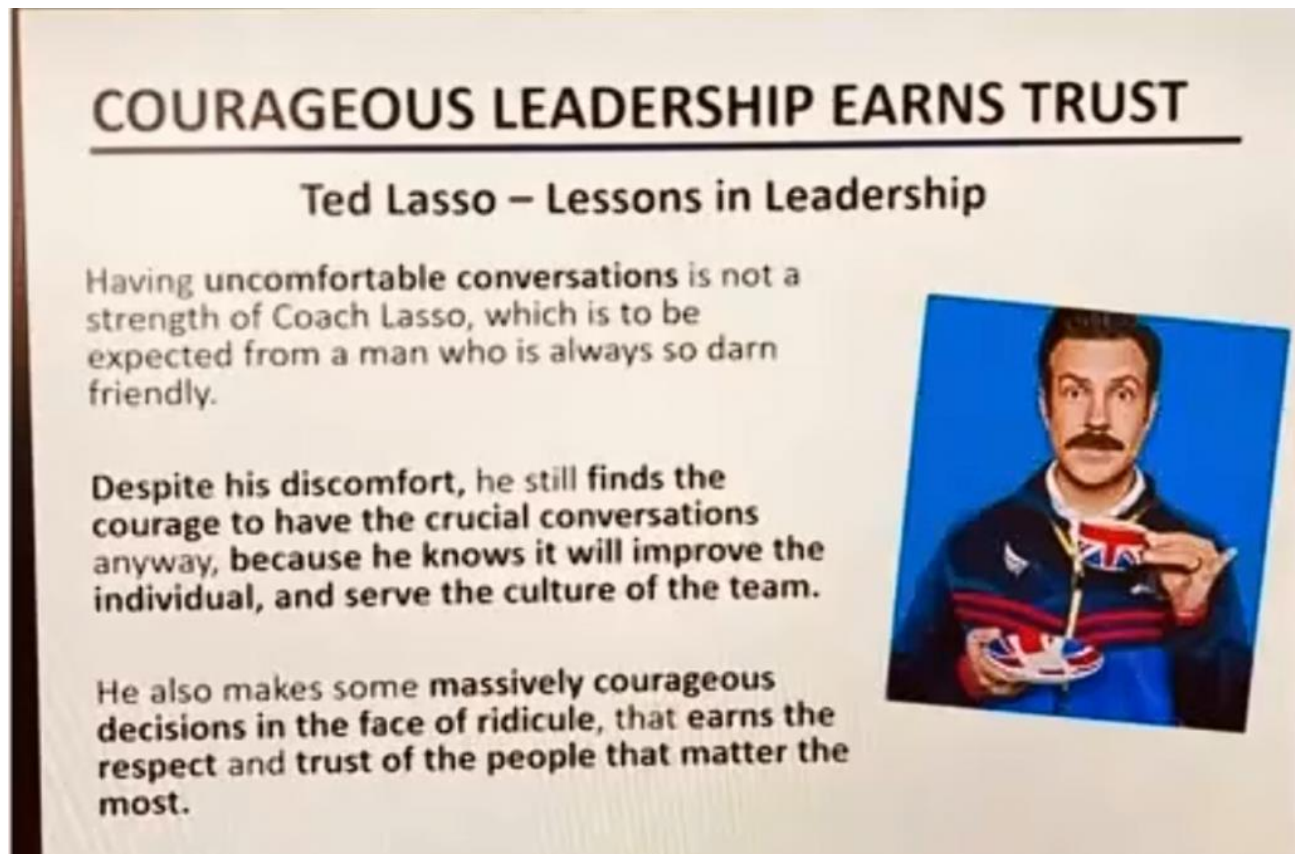


During a keynote speech on leadership at the Tri-Merit Bridging the Gap 2024 conference on July 24, Koltin Consulting Group CEO Allan Koltin asked those in attendance if they watch the show *Ted Lasso*. A majority of the people in the room at the Loews Chicago O'Hare Hotel in Rosemont, IL, raised their hands.

“I’ve got to tell you, it’s one of the greatest television shows on leadership that I’ve ever seen,” Koltin said. “Talk about somebody who checks their ego at the door!”

He then showed the audience a slide featuring Ted Lasso—played by actor and comedian Jason Sudeikis—under the title, “Ted Lasso—Lessons in Leadership.” The text of the slide says, in part:

“Having **uncomfortable conversations** is not a strength of Coach Lasso, which is to be expected from a man who is always so darn friendly. **Despite his discomfort**, he still **finds the courage to have the crucial conversations anyway, because he knows it will improve the individual, and serve the culture of the team.**”




COURAGEOUS LEADERSHIP EARNS TRUST

Ted Lasso – Lessons in Leadership

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Despite his discomfort, he still finds the courage to have the crucial conversations anyway, **because he knows it will improve the individual, and serve the culture of the team.**

He also makes some **massively courageous decisions in the face of ridicule**, that earns the respect and trust of the people that matter the most.



Slide courtesy of Allan Koltin.

Koltin then said the greatest flaw of leaders of accounting and consulting firms is the inability to have uncomfortable conversations.

“I call it constructive confrontation,” he said. “It’s on our to-do list every day—there’s a couple difficult conversations you need to have with others, and you don’t want to do it.”

Koltin joked that the reason is “because we’re nice people in this profession,” but he’s noticed that other people outside the accounting profession have observed that too.

“Some of you know that I’ve started working a lot with private equity [firms], they’re trying to come into the profession,” Koltin said. “And over a beer or a drink, I’ll say, ‘So tell me, what do you think about accountants?’ And they say, ‘They’re the nicest people you’ll ever meet, and they have integrity, and you can trust them. But damn, they just can’t make tough decisions.’”

Constructive confrontation is the ability to sit with somebody and have a difficult discussion, Koltin said.

The Chicago-based Koltin often is invited to accounting firms' partner retreats throughout the year, and before he attends, he said he surveys all the partners. Koltin said one of the questions he asks the partners is: What do you think about the current CEO?

On one occasion, after a retreat at a decent-sized firm, Koltin said he shared the results with the CEO, who Koltin didn't want to name so he referred to him as "Mark." The CEO called Koltin and he said the conversation went like this:

Mark: You know, I was shocked at how much everyone loves me and likes me. How does this compare to others you've seen?

Allan Koltin: Mark, this is the highest approval rating I've ever seen in a CEO.

Mark: Wow, I knew I was good, but I didn't know I was *that* good.

Allan Koltin: Mark, you're terrible. You're not making tough decisions. You're not upsetting people. You're not doing your job, and look at the numbers. You used to run a country—everybody lined up and they knew what to do. You know what you run today? You run a country club. Everybody does whatever they want, and all hell's breaking loose. You have to change your leadership style.

The three-day Bridging the Gap conference concludes today.