

Two of the most popular, top-ten movies of all time actually came as a pair—*The Godfather* and *The Godfather Part II*—starring actors like Marlon Brando, Al Pacino, and Diane Keaton. These two films are quite extraordinary examples of movies of amazing storytelling using magnetic, highly integrated themes! Yeah, themes like family and immigration and sin and crime and loyalty and ambition and murder, sleekly wrapped up in an earlier America! And all of it is captured in the fictional Corleone family Mafia syndicate. Here's an excerpt of a scene in *The Godfather Part II*. Vito Corleone, a young Italian immigrant was just starting out in a life of crime, and the local mafia kingpin, Don Fanucci, says this: "Young man, I hear that you and your friends are stealing goods...You should let me wet my beak a little...for your own protection."

Ah, that rich phrase...*wet my beak*...means to take a generous cut from the activity taking place. You see, there's a fresh new measure of illegal financial activity going on, so the local kingpin Don Fanucci wants in on the action. And Fanucci presumes to get that cut...and his threat for noncompliance is made very clear.

Hey, we're here to talk about a less sinister but still very erosive "wet my beak" phenomenon...in supply chains! But let's back up for a minute: I'm *not* talking about *event disruptions* to supply chains, happenings we're all familiar with from the news or our common experiences. A global event-disruption happens to many supply chains at once, like the COVID pandemic. A smaller-scale event-disruption happens in an industry when there's a labor strike—like the strike in 2023 by the WGA, the Writers Guild in America, a strike by writers in film, television, radio, and online media. Or an event-disruption can happen *for a much smaller or isolated consumer group*, like when an isolated part for a farm tractor becomes unavailable and that stops all production. Disruptions like these can impact any particular group, small or large, anytime.

Look, we understand these kinds of event-disruptions because of our recent universal personal experience with COVID...the overwhelming government responses to it...and their combined negative impact on many supply chains. You know, like happened with rampant toilet tissue shortages...with many schools closing or radically altering delivery services...with little to no travel options...and of course much more!

But here's the deal. The more consistent, relentless threat to *your* workplace enterprise's vital supply chains—day in and day out—is the slow-but-sure, relentless decline that comes from wet-my-beak, non-stewarding, often-self-serving people, processes, and practices. OK, so how's that for laying it on the line?

So, the blunt truth *is* that many *internal and external* supply chains are inexorably weakened and then unceremoniously overwhelmed by competing approaches. And a major cause of that is a lot of individuals, departments, companies, and government bureaucracies routinely "wetting their beaks" in very unproductive ways that adds costs and delays and inefficiencies that are ultimately paid for by consumers. And while some such wet-beakers are fairly innocently acting as a "cog in the machine," others simply are quite happy to add little to no value while getting paid. Either way, many folks in many enterprises *do* wet their beaks within inefficient, expensive, unnecessary processes...both inside and outside the enterprise!

OK, how about Harvard fostering unnecessary *internal* supply chain expense? Well, the *Harvard Crimson*—the student-led, daily newspaper operating as a non-profit independent of the University—[reported in an op-ed in 2022 that Harvard had 7,045 full-time administrators. That was over three times the number of full-time faculty directly serving students. That also means that there were almost as many full-time administrators as undergraduate students!](#) If you believe that Harvard is in the teaching business, then this is exactly the type of supply chain bloat that arises from internal forces that routinely *wet their beaks* with high salaries! Yes, Harvard pays bureaucrats high salaries at the expense of students whose tuition retailed for over \$52,000 in 2022. Of course, some administrators are needed and very valuable! *But talk about unnecessary costs*: one full-time administrator per enrolled undergraduate student? Really? Sadly, this type *and often this scope* of problem plagues many sizable businesses and nonprofits. Hey, the church

itself is no exception: how many churches leverage their human resources to impact their communities as well as countries around the world with an effective, efficient gospel message that actually grows the Kingdom of God? You know, like the church at Antioch sending missionaries (Acts 13).

Hey, every organization struggles with discerning—and *also later recalibrating*—the number of people truly needed for the key mission at hand. But the pesky underlying problem is that most every department administrator advocates that all their people are *totally vital* to the supply chain, to serving the customer, somehow, in some key way—even though others don't really see that! But, duh, it turns out, entrenched administrators who're wetting the beaks of many unneeded workers do increase the costs of products and services! So, \$50,000 here...\$65,000 there...it all adds up to higher, embedded supply chain costs. This is way beyond Harvard...*virtually every large organization in the U.S. has a problem with inefficient bloat!* So why do companies lay off, say, 40,000 workers at one time? Because they previously lacked the crucial stewardship to identify and stop wetting unneeded beaks in their enterprises! Speaking personally as a seasoned turnaround executive, *it's much better to dry a few beaks sooner rather than a lot of beaks later!*

Another key wet-the-beaks *internal* issue is when new digital processes render a company's traditional activities obsolete...but this time it's mostly due to *lack of strategic leadership*. Sometimes an entire supply chain gets blown away—how about Netflix taking out Blockbuster? Strategically, Blockbuster's leaders didn't fathom that all their building lease costs and store employee costs and the DVDs themselves were all being eclipsed by new digital approaches. So now, there's *no one* wetting their beaks at Blockbuster!

But most times it's not about a firm's total existence right now, it's about major adjustments that need to be made *internally*. How about the coming of Amazon challenging countless retailers to embrace more of the digital world? Yeah, it took years for many retailers to adjust to digital catalogues, digital ordering, and digital payments. And, yes, many retailers simply did fail. Candidly, for many firms slouching towards wet-their-beaks-driven fiascos, the only course correction they will heed is the pain of competitors like Netflix or Amazon forcing them to reconsider what they're doing! And sometimes that comes too late. But the leaders *truly leading* in the digital era recognize that they must relentlessly address any internal wet-the-beaks people-and-process issues in order to foster...and then maintain...market competitiveness.

So, then, what do we mean by *external* wet-their-beaks forces? Well, of course, government officials and bureaucrats at the federal, state, local, and even school levels play their roles, often on the well-worn path of do-gooder self-righteousness. So now—more than ever—government is *ubiquitously everywhere* to try to radically regulate activity in America to protect consumers...or citizens...or the environment...or at some schools nowadays, *supposed sinners' very own children!* All that *government righteousness* costs lots of money to fund and to comply with! To be clear now, *wise regulation is* needed due to the sin problem inherent in any human economy. But many agendas are often just self-righteousness run amok.

Here's the deal. "Wetting beaks" is part of human nature—and often it's an exercise that's very lucrative! But honest stewardship and the necessary leadership in each enterprise requires that we acknowledge that a *whole lot of the wetting of beaks is itself largely the sins of humans in action*—people getting a lot of others' money for delivering little to nothing positive. The job of executives is to work relentlessly to dry those beaks...reducing such activity to a minimum! And if leaders don't routinely pursue drying beaks, well, by golly, *their competitors will punish their inaction!* Go ahead...ask a Blockbuster employee!

Remember that movie scene where Fanucci wanted to wet his beak? Well, Vito Corleone took care of that idea...by killing him! But that only happens in the real world today in enterprises like Mexican drug cartels or in dictator-run countries where otherwise-healthy adversaries leap from tall buildings or just disappear. But our path ahead is much different: strong and necessary stewardship—*consistently drying some beaks!*

## *A&A: Application & Action*

1. Quick, for your workplace organization, on a scale of 1-10, what is the enterprise's track record for drying beaks? Give success stories, or alternatively, areas that need addressing.
  
2. Quick, on a scale of 1-10, what is your *personal* track record for drying beaks in your area of responsibility...even if your total workplace enterprise focus is lacking in this area? Do you consider your results a stewardship witness or model for others? Do others? Discuss.
  
3. Quick, for your local church, on a scale of 1-10, what is the effectiveness and efficiency of your supply chain of the gospel of the Kingdom of God—both locally and around the world? Discuss.