

Governing Energy

Demons Among Us

Volume 2 Number 11—June 3, 2013

In the first season (1960) of Rod Serling's television show, the Twilight Zone, he aired the episode; *The Monsters are Due on Maple Street*.ⁱ Readers are invited to watch this show online; however, the crux of the story is that aliens manipulate certain events preying on human paranoia. This causes residents on a street in American suburbia to turn on one another, resulting in murder and the complete breakdown of the societal norms of that community.

Much has changed since that era of black and white (tube) television and many like to suggest that society is in a new normal of social media, 3D widescreen home theaters and a slew of modern conveniences developed over the insuring half century. However, this author would like to submit that human nature has not changed or at least has not evolved far from that Leave It to Beaver period.ⁱⁱ

We are all still products of our biases, suspicions, jealousies and even competitiveness despite our desire to scale Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.ⁱⁱⁱ At the base levels of this pyramid is our fundamental need to survive and be secure. In times of stress, we all must directly address these foundational requisites.

After a major storm, in addition to reviewing the devastation and loss of life, the media also reports on two bi-polar behaviors. Those risking life and limb jumping in to save strangers and helping to rebuild with no thought of self, much less reward or publicity. On the other hand, some take this opportunity to add to the mayhem. Looting, vandalism and even physical acts of violence are their byproducts.

The story ends with two aliens acknowledging that the events on Maple Street had been a test and that humans were easy to turn on each other. Their approach to subjugation would incorporate this lesson into the plans to invade earth.

In his closing narrative, Serling says that "*The tools of conquest do not necessarily come with bombs, and explosions, and fallout. There are weapons that are simply thoughts, attitudes, prejudices, to be found only in the minds of men. For the record, prejudices can kill and suspicion can destroy. And a thoughtless, frightened search for a scapegoat has a fallout all its own, for the children, and the children yet unborn. And the pity of it is...that these things cannot be confined to the Twilight Zone.*"^{iv}

This timeless story has relevance in our modern world. How many of us know individuals or internal groups that consciously seek to undermine organizational success? Many act as the residents of Maple Street when faced with uncertainty, change or other events. The term, "*throwing (insert name) under the bus*" is a direct result of the acceptance for an *everyone for him/herself* mentality.

The challenge is to develop an organizational culture that brings out the best of individuals during times of trauma. One would fear that without top leadership to drive this type of behavior, the grandchildren of residents of Maple Street may be in your employ.

How will you respond if internal paranoia is undermining your organization's performance?

About the Author

Dr. [Scott M. Shemwell](#) has over 30 years technical and executive management experience primarily in the energy sector. He is the author of two books and has written extensively about the field of operations management. Shemwell is also the CEO of Knowledge Ops, Inc.; a firm that focuses on providing its customers with solutions enabling operations excellence and regulatory compliance management.

End Notes

ⁱ <http://www.hulu.com/watch/440892>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.tv.com/shows/leave-it-to-beaver/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://psychology.about.com/od/theoriesofpersonality/a/hierarchyneeds.htm>

^{iv} http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Monsters_Are_Due_on_Maple_Street