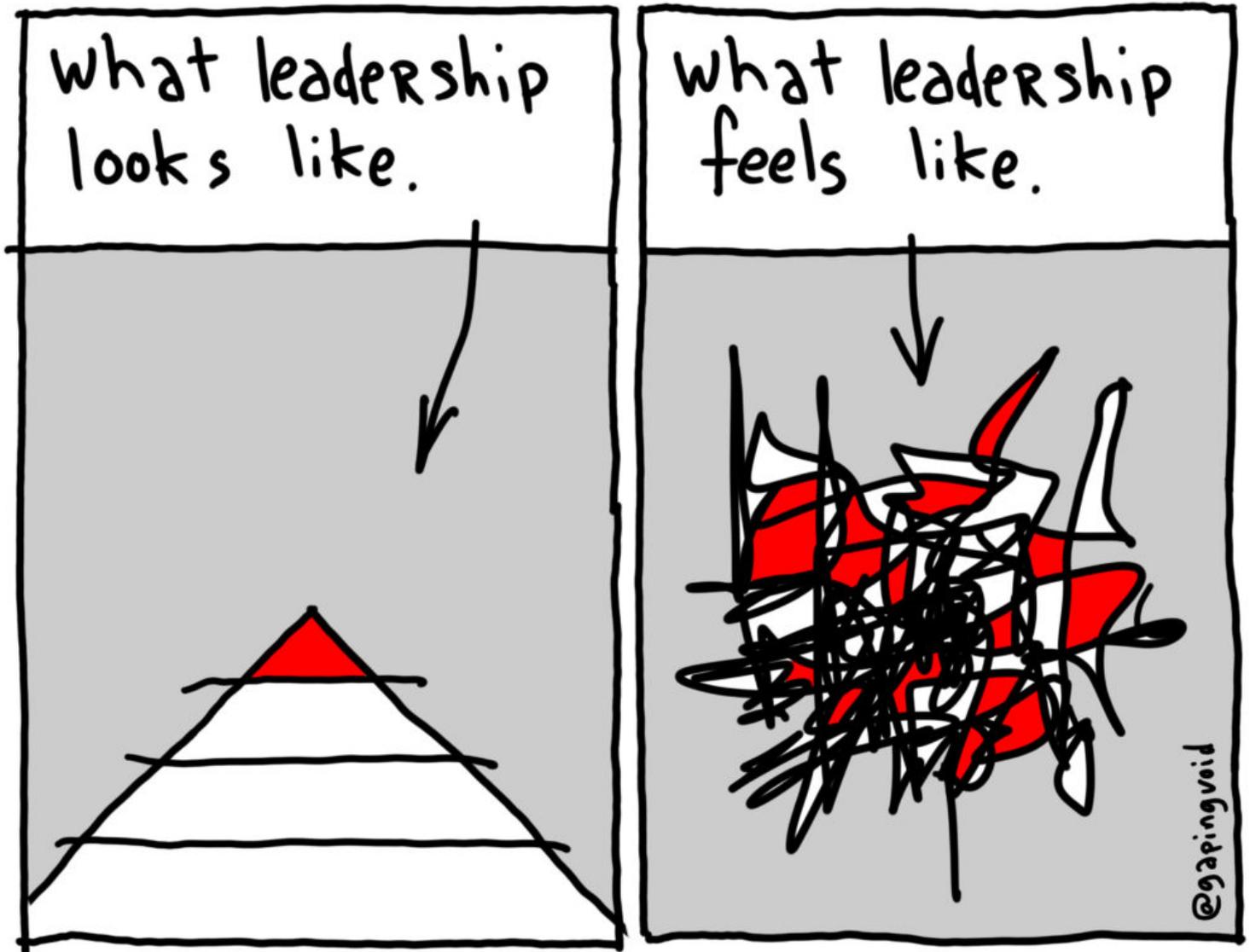


## Leadership is messy



In renowned psychologist Alison Gopnik's must-read book, *The Gardener and the Carpenter*, she makes a seemingly too obvious statement: "Children are messy."

It's not a new or radical thought, but sometimes we don't need to be taught something new as much as simply reminded of something important but perhaps out of mind.

My two-year-old grandson, Benjamin, recently had a meltdown in a nice restaurant. Yep, children are messy. He drew a nice picture of a house, dog, and moon—on the wall of our hallway. Yep, children are messy. I could go on ad infinitum, but you get my drift.

When these mishaps occur, reminding myself that "children are messy" seems to help me deal with them. Perhaps just anticipating that unfortunate things *will* happen ameliorates the discomfort.

Now, let's switch applications. Here's a reminder to leaders: *leadership is messy*.

- No matter how conscientious you are about hiring good people, you'll make mistakes.
- Well-thought-out strategies that you consider bulletproof will sometimes fail.
- Earn a black belt in internal communications, but you'll still have embarrassing moments of

confusion and misalignment in your organization.

- Even though you carefully negotiate dismissing an under-performing staff member, you still might get sued.

Work hard at leading well, but don't be surprised or overly discouraged when things fall apart or get messy. Don't be cavalier about breakdowns, but don't let them disrupt your confidence or determination.

The constant challenges that leaders face may cause you to rethink being one. You may be happier and more fulfilled in a non-leadership role—functioning as an achiever rather than a leader. There's nothing wrong with that.

Raising children and leading an organization have one thing in common: both are messy.

Here's a video of a smart leader responding to a difficult situation.