



May 2008 - Issue #27

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Leadership - can anyone become a leader?

Leadership is more important than ever. Profit margins are slim and continue to be squeezed. Oil and gas prices continue to rise. Employee benefit costs continue to rise. The weak economy is worrisome for many businesses. More companies hope that mergers and acquisitions will improve their situation, yet more than 70% of mergers and acquisitions result in less desirable outcomes than anticipated. And, with baby boomers starting to retire, knowledge and skills are retiring with them. It is tough to keep great employees - sure, it is relatively easy to hang on to most of the so-so and problem employees but it requires something different to keep your stars. So, what can you do? If you are an Executive or Business Owner, find and hang on to the best leaders. And, if you are an employee with an interest in leadership, put your focus into becoming a superb leader - yes, anyone can become a leader. As I've said before, the right people are your #1 asset, so with that background, what could be more important than your leaders?

When the CEO of your company calls, do employees jump to answer because he/ she is the CEO or because he/ she is a great leader? Alternately, how many of your employees follow someone in your company that does not have a fancy title; instead, they follow him/her because they respect and believe in him/ her? The second example is evidence that anyone can become a leader, title or no title, regardless of background, etc. I've seen several examples of this occurrence over the years - be on the lookout for these leaders, recognize them and promote/ pay for performance. This one action can be your strategic advantage!

Leaders have several qualities which are key to their success: First, leaders actively look for opportunities to give others credit (whether or not they report to them) yet are the first to accept personal blame for whatever goes wrong. Second, leaders are genuine and consistently do what they say they will do - this sounds quite obvious but is rarely achieved. Third, leaders prioritize communication, starting by listening and valuing feedback and input, followed with the second priority of communicating what is going on. It is amazing how big a difference it can make to people to understand why leaders are doing what they are doing (what is the vision, why focus on a certain initiative, how what each person and/or department relates to the business objectives, etc). It is not required to update employees on everything, including sensitive information - just keep employees in the loop continually and tell them what you are able to tell them and tell them there is certain information that you cannot communicate at this time (and, assuming you have their respect and have consistently communicated over time, they understand and embrace it). Fourth, leaders continually look for diamonds in the rough (ideas, people, opportunities, etc), focus on strengths, and keep people energized and engaged in achieving the goals. Fifth, at the same time, leaders are not afraid to face the facts, address issues, admit mistakes and ask for help. After all, the leader is only as good as his/ her team. There are many more, but the key to remember is that a leader is the sort of person people want to follow (regardless of whether the leader can affect your career advancement, pay, assignments etc).

When I've been involved with businesses with these sort of leaders, amazingly, the business just seemed to "fall into place" - sales, profits and cash flow simply "worked". Unfortunately, I've also seen more examples than I wish I had where new leaders came into this sort of situation with opposite philosophies to the above characteristics, and the business continued to excel for quite a long period of time (after all, the sign of excellent leadership is that you can walk away from the business and it will carry on without you); however, after awhile, it started to slowly deteriorate and the good leaders/

employees left (unfortunately, many times, enough time went by that the cause and effect were never understood). So, why not choose the road to sales, profits and engaged employees - focus on leadership!

Lisa's Tips: work-life balance

Since I'm writing this newsletter from my vacation, it seemed a perfect topic to discuss, starting with the topic of why work while on vacation:

1. Do what works for YOU - in my case, I'm able to work for a few hours and relax for a few hours without one affecting the other negatively (an example of why I chose to write this newsletter from San Diego instead of cram one more item in prior to leaving for vacation, which would have stressed me out). However, I have a few friends that feel the opposite - if the two become mixed, neither is accomplished successfully. So, know yourself and do what works for you.
2. Do what works for YOU part two - what do you enjoy? Some people love to get out for a brief walk. Others love to get away for lunch. Others enjoy surfing the net. Others love reading. Discover what you enjoy and schedule in time for yourself throughout the day - either at planned intervals, after completing an important task or whatever makes sense. Most of these activities can take from 5 minutes to an hour but they provide some relief, and many times, you'll return to work refreshed and more productive.
3. Take time off/ vacations - as my HR mentor is famous for repeating, everyone needs time off/ vacations and should take them. It is a priority, and an important priority for the company as well since refreshed and energized employees tend to be productive, happier and sometimes healthier employees. And, if you are a leader, it is your duty to take vacation - everyone watches / follows what you do.
4. Focus on what you are doing "at the time you are doing it" - I've been accused many times in the past (and even now from time to time) of not really being present because my mind wanders to something else, and it is excellent advice. Be in the moment - as the sayings say, smell the flowers, notice 'new' things (a friend recently noticed several, 'new' interesting things on a frequently traveled route, and it seemed to add spice to her day), enjoy the present (focus on the now, don't worry about the past or future), etc.
5. First, look for the positive - avoid jumping immediately to the negative.

Recommended Reading

["A Bull in China: Investing Profitably in the World's Greatest Market"](#) by Jim Rogers - much more than an investment book, this is an interesting perspective on China's progression over the last 20-25 years with a glimpse into the future.

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