

Knowing What To Do Next

Someone has said that a leader is someone who knows what to do next. It follows, then, that if a leader does not know what to do next, they will find out what to do next. Leadership is as much about fore thought and intentionality as it is about knowledge and skill. There are hundreds of very bright people who are poor leaders.

So, with over 50,000 titles on leadership, it is easy to think about leadership as a series of systems and ideas. At best, it is a search for the perfect method, or formula. At worst, these ideas become the “flavor of the month”, presented to us by authors and consultants, for inspiration, but not necessarily effective execution.

With traditional top down leadership practices proven ill suited for our times, where will leaders turn to keep pace with rapid change and be able to lead people who are better educated and more capable than ever?

Leaders need a simple model, one that is both easy to remember and easy to execute. We need a model that will help us to maintain our focus in good times and when times are not so good. One might say that we are presently working in times that are not so good.

Patrick Townsend and Joan Gebhardt have suggested that there are “Three Priorities of Leadership” (Leader To Leader, Spring 1997). In looking at training in the military, they observed three common priorities that formed the basis for leadership that would be understood by all ranks, both in and out of combat.

Accomplish the Mission

Nothing else really matters, in the end.

If we are not able to lead a team to achieve our mission and vision, and the things that are important to us, we have done little more than accumulate frequent flyer miles and checks for reimbursed travel expenses. We must understand the difference between activities that do not deliver results and the tireless pursuit of excellence in what we do.

When leaders stay in front of their people, clearing the pathway forward, they will have little time for second guessing or micro managing their people.

Take Care of Your People

When we take the lead in clearly defining roles and responsibilities for others, we reduce confusion and communicate the importance of personal contribution. This will always result in a higher level of performance, always. We do our people a disservice when we do not make the effort to do this with them and for them. And yet, it is the most overlooked leadership task today.

Give encouragement as often as you can. One can never say “Thank you” too many times to those who have joined in their life at work with you.

Be proactive and very intentional in designing and maintaining an effective reward system. This means adequate and competitive salaries, appropriate benefits and carefully selected perks, all wrapped together in a package that is both consistent and fair.

And, know this, if there have not been significant and planned adjustments to compensation for four years, or more, or during times of rapidly rising costs, expect turnover to increase. It is just the way it is.

Grow the Next Generation of Leaders.

When I ask CEOs, “What keeps you awake at night?”, the most common response is, “How can I increase the leadership capacity of my people?”. (And also give me better balance in my work and life) They have a sense that they have started dancing with a bear and that they will not be able to stop dancing until the bear wants to stop.

The leader’s dilemma is that he or she is ultimately responsible for the performance of the whole.

The leader’s challenge is how to grow a company beyond their own abilities, and their own attitudes about people and leadership.

Creating a “growing leaders” environment excites and energizes everyone in the company. It releases people who are able to confidently “run the business” while the leaders of the company figure out how to “grow the business” and to continue to grow their people.

Ron Maines does his best work when he comes alongside leaders and their companies to help them get from where they are to where they want to be. He can be reached at 479.790.1713 or ron@crossroadsleaders.com