

# Leading Your Team

Three principles to guide you

BY GREG POWELL

**S**oldiers showing aptitude in leadership are invited to take a combat leadership course, one of the most punishing and rewarding programs a soldier can experience. During the program, they are taught 10 battle-proven principles of leadership and given opportunities to demonstrate their understanding in real-life situations.

As mentioned in “Leading Your Team” (see the June 2008 edition of *FORUM*), there are parallels between a career in the Canadian financial services industry and the life of a soldier. Coming into this industry from a long military career with Canadian Combat Engineers has given me a good vantage point from which to observe these similarities.

To achieve results, this industry needs leadership, not just managers. For advisors, it’s a time in history that carries heavy responsibility as they deal with the challenge of the boomer demographic moving into a new stage of life and seeking financial advice. These circumstances require a leader with the intestinal fortitude to navigate their advisors through the noise, smoke and confusion that lay ahead.

We have already explored the first three principles of leadership in the June issue: develop leadership potential within your team; know your people and promote their welfare; and be a team. We will now look at the next three.

## 4: SEEK AND ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY

The only way to get better at the craft of leadership is to get into the trenches and do the job. Looking down at your toes and hoping no one calls your name isn’t leadership. When you have a chance to put your neck on the line for a new campaign idea or battle an underwriting decision on behalf of one of your advisors, rise to the occasion. Carrying out the task successfully requires

taking ownership and placing yourself at some risk. Nothing is gained by taking the path of least resistance or hoping that things will just eventually improve. Become adept at identifying the opportunities in everyday circumstances to take control of situations and move them forward.

## 5: ACHIEVE PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE

One of the elements of being believable as a leader is being credible. This is why for hundreds of years, military organizations have promoted from within their ranks. You become a sergeant after first being a corporal and a private for several years. This allows individuals to gain experience and test their skills in challenging situations at home and abroad, in peace and conflict.

The financial services industry is much the same. Knowledgeable, competent people can be found within the advisor ranks. Managers who spend even a modest amount of time in the advisor environment have a greater understanding and more credibility than those parachuted in from outside the industry.

Time and experience are important but education is the key to building competency. One of the most powerful ways to become professionally competent in financial services is through earning designations such as CFP, CLU and RHU. Learn as much as possible about a wide variety of subjects and become a voracious reader.

You can’t expect your advisors to develop professionally if they don’t see you doing it. Share with them the articles you’ve read, relevant resources you’ve found and learnings from a course that had an impact on you. By doing so, your advisors will also strive to be proficient, benefiting the clients who prefer to work with advisors who continually sharpen their skills.

## 6: KEEP YOUR TEAM INFORMED

Only by knowing what’s happening in the entire theatre of operations can a soldier make the decisions needed to get the job done. Removing a minefield at night requires you to know who is in front of you, who is behind you and what is on either side of you. Technical skills are not enough.

The unknown is scary; it causes doubt, which in turn can cause costly delays in decision-making. The absence of accurate information can lead to rumours, which cost time and effort to investigate and eradicate before your troops are fully functional again. Distracted soldiers are a danger to themselves and others around them.

Much like soldiers, advisors also need to be given the “big picture.” Keep them up to date on salient issues in the Canadian marketplace, government regulators, federal budgets, the financial industry, their company, the competition, product changes and so on. It’s important for them to do their jobs effectively and to provide this same big picture to the clients they service.

The combat leadership course teaches that leadership is a privilege, not a right. This holds true whether you’re in the military service or the financial service. So seek responsibility, even if risky, and reduce that risk by being professionally competent and arming your people with the information they need to do their jobs successfully. **E**

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