

Leadership for Results; Not Prestige, Money, or Position

By Michael Tourond

I walked into the office where I was charged with leading a training session with the sales managers of a large financial services office. There were 12 managers that I had divided into teams of four for an ice-breaking exercise, more for my benefit to give me a feel for the people I was working with. The exercise had each manager on each team receive a specific task that had to be completed within the boundaries of two rules: no written or verbal communication was allowed between team members; and the team that completed all of their tasks first won.

One manager named Linda completed her task in a flash, then another manager on her team (his name was Mark) who was struggling with his task handed it to Linda. She completed his task within a minute; meanwhile Mark waved his other team members on to pass their tasks on to Linda. Linda completed all of her team's tasks before any other team had completed one.

The other side of this story is that the branch manager that Mark reported to was not happy with Mark and his management style. The branch manager was a solemn man, a workaholic who tended to take on as much responsibility as possible, with the full intention to do as good a job at it as possible. While there is nothing wrong with that, Mark appeared to regularly come in late, leave early, delegated difficult tasks to others, and his work with clients included taking them to lunch or golfing.

The problem to the branch manager was that Mark was one of the company's top performers. During the training session, it became clear to the branch manager that Mark was successful because he respected his people, knew their strengths, and delegated work where he knew it would get done best, then gave them the autonomy to get it done.

After the session the branch manager relayed to me that, with his workload, he had forgotten that in our brain-based industry, our best assets are our people. He could not have been more correct. With the flood of industry mergers and acquisitions, people have too often been assumed to be chess pieces to be moved around by the grand masters in ivory towers. This results in morale, energy, and performance problems. Too many managers have become immersed in restructuring and the latest management fad on the best-sellers list, and have forgotten what leadership is all about.

Leadership is not about prestige, money, or position ... in business, leadership is responsibility for getting results! Results are achieved by leadership that produces an environment where the brightest and most creative are attracted, retained, and most importantly motivated to achieve!

My work takes me to financial services offices across Canada. Some of these offices are more successful than others. The more successful offices tend to share certain characteristics amongst their leaders that foster the environment we are discussing.

More successful offices are not only well managed, they are well led. This is a visible difference and a key reason why successful businesses are able to break away from the pack. Unfortunately, many people in leadership positions are not leaders. They are managers, bureaucrats, bosses, administrators, or department heads. Few people, especially salespeople, want to work for a manager. The difference between managing and leading is a topic for another article, but it is important to make this distinction; to manage is to control or manipulate; to lead is to guide, influence, and persuade. You manage things such as systems, processes and technology. You lead people. Great leaders know that if they need to manage someone, they need to manage themselves so that they can see the big success and know that it is possible by leading others.

Successful offices have a well-defined strategic vision that their leaders have completely bought into (and likely had a hand in developing). Great leaders make this vision their mission and their focus on it is so strong that it can be felt by others. Their concern for the mission is so exciting and tangible that it draws people in. They become dispensers of enthusiasm. What is your primary focus right now? If you can't immediately answer the question it's a sure bet you need to clarify your vision.

Successful offices have leaders that do not do, they enable. It is common for leaders to become too action-oriented and, in the process, lose touch with the more important development of their people. After all they were likely promoted to a leadership position because they were good at what they were doing. The leader was a gifted salesperson, engineer or actuary with a talent for that position. Becoming a leader is a huge leap of faith. It requires great self-discipline to let go of everything they were doing in order to move into a role that requires them to not only help others do the job, but to give them the latitude to grow. Many a million dollar producer remains a 10-dollar subordinate because their leader could not stand back and give them the freedom to take the initiative and develop.

Leadership is essentially the ability to get things done through the efforts of others. Sounds easy, but it truly is an art that transforms and changes with the times and culture. And we are seeing more change now than ever. Are you up for the challenge?

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