



Column
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MORE PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

Studies and my own experience have shown that poor leadership is a leading cause of slow employee morale, far ahead of workload, salary and benefits. Correcting poor leadership should therefore be on the top of every manager's and entrepreneur's agenda for improvement.



Many leadership mistakes can be corrected if managers and executives understand and apply a few simple yet powerful principles. A principle-centred approach is premised on the idea that leadership can be systematically taught and learned. Principles represent a distillation of practical expertise and, in some cases, centuries of experience.

In the last issue, I introduced the first six of a dozen principles that are critical for success as a leader. Let's now look at the second six of these principles.

SURROUND YOURSELF WITH TRUSTED ADVISORS AND ASSOCIATES.

Leadership entails accountability for actions and behaviour. With that said, no person is an island. The demands of leadership are such that no one person can be expected to have all the answers to every single question. Asking for advice is not a sign of weakness but rather of confidence and poise. All effective leaders, no matter what the field, surround themselves with teams of advisors and associates. The advisors should know the leader and not be afraid to tell it like it is. Conversely, the leader should not hesitate to seek counsel in times of uncertainty or crisis. Anyone who can ask for advice and genuinely want it obviously feels secure. Providing the leader is decisive and prone to action, asking for advice usually leads to greater personal power and effectiveness.

ALWAYS RESPECT OTHERS.

A key function of leaders is to bring people of various backgrounds and competencies together to form a cohesive team. In fact, teamwork is THE key to healthy motivation, group morale, and cooperation. However, nothing undermines teamwork more than a lack of respect. Lack of respect toward employees and collaborators can be a major cause of workplace stress, emotional distress, and even burnout. Fortunately, there is a relatively simple approach which virtually guarantees the ability to respect others: the Golden Rule. Treat others the way you would want to be treated and you have a ready-made litmus test for your attitudes and actions towards co-workers, employees, and even superiors in any organization.

DEAL WITH OTHERS ON THE BASIS OF FACTS, NOT CONJECTURE.

This one is very important. The only effective way anyone can learn anything is to base that learning on hard facts, not supposition. For instance, when criticizing an employee, it is essential to use examples of the unwanted behaviour or results by focusing exclusively on observed facts. Unfortunately, many people tend to infer the motivations and beliefs of others and to criticize them on that basis. Rather than telling an employee, "John, your last four sales reports have

been late," (good) we often hear things like, "Joan, why are you so lazy when it comes to writing sales reports?" (bad)

We should never assume knowledge of another person's thoughts and motivations. Very often we aren't even sure of our own motivations, so how can we get into someone else's head. By focusing strictly on observed behaviour and results, we can offer constructive criticism and praise. This builds credibility and influence as a leader, and engenders trust in others.

HAVE A SENSE OF HUMOUR.

There's nothing worse than working with a sourpuss. It's even worse if that person is your boss. If you can laugh at yourself and your situation, whatever the circumstances, you're more likely to learn and be open to novel solutions. This doesn't include making light of real problems or mocking others, but self-deprecating humour, when used adroitly, can endear you to others faster than any other method I can think of. Before you know it, you'll be recognized as down-to-earth and approachable by all people.

GET OUT AND ABOUT.

If you don't ask, you won't know. I am constantly amazed when I see managers and entrepreneurs who fail to capitalize on this simple approach to finding out what's happening. Talk to people. Ask them questions. You'll be surprised at what you'll learn. One thing we can be sure of, most people love to talk about their projects, their tasks, their responsibilities. Simply asking someone where they're from and what they do, whether in your own organization, a client's, or even a competitor's can yield a wealth of information and intelligence. Try it and you'll soon be "in the know".

IN A CRISIS, STAY COOL, CALM, AND COLLECTED.

No one respects a leader who gets easily frazzled and angry at the slightest provocation. When faced with a crisis, always validate the information you get, because it's more than likely wrong, at least initially. Also, avoid overreacting. This sounds easy, but in reality it takes enormous self-control and personal mastery to pull it off. There are techniques and tools to deal with these situations, and they are well worth the time and effort to learn and master.

These principles can be the basis of a focused leadership development program for managers and entrepreneurs. On the other hand, there is nothing stopping you from starting to apply them immediately. They are conceptually quite simple, but this can be deceptive. Just because a technique or a principle is simple, doesn't mean that it can be easily and consistently applied. That takes resolve and persistence, as well as an openness to feedback, both negative and positive. The key element is to be consistent in their application, and to seek constant feedback to maximize learning.

Richard Martin is founder and president of Alcera Consulting Inc. He helps excellent executives and entrepreneurs to become world-class leaders and to thrive in the face of rapid change and uncertainty. There is a wealth of free information available for download on his website, www.alcera.ca, where you can also sign up for his free monthly newsletter, Leadership Catalyst.