



THE BENCHMARK

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The leadership/growth connection

One of my clients has a leadership approach that's limited his company's ability to grow and attract quality talent. He is fair, but often manages with stern, in-your-face comments, is never wrong, is certainly impatient and is just negative at times. Sound familiar?

To his credit, he's changing after I pointed out his weaknesses, but the scenario leads to the question, "Are leaders born or made?" The answer is both, but data shows more leaders are made than born into greatness. The path isn't easy, but rewards and growth in business lie ahead if you're an owner or manager that's willing to look in the mirror and make some changes.

Leadership is defined as "a process of social influence in which one person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task." Studies about leadership have produced theories stating leaders must have traits such as vision, charisma, intelligence and core values. So how do you stack up? If you want to succeed in this industry you need people to follow you. It's difficult enough to find help and to compete, but if you don't invest in making yourself a better leader you're missing the boat. Focus on these points to begin your transformation.

Know your strengths and weaknesses. Effective leaders invest in their strengths and then surround themselves with the right people to maximize their teams in areas where they are weak. The question is how? Start by taking a personality profile test. Myers-Briggs, DISC or Wonderlic assessments all are effective. These reports reveal strengths, weaknesses, motivations, work habits and insights for your improvement. Don't surround yourself with people just like you. I know it's easy to like them (of course, they remind you of yourself), but it's a mistake plain and simple. Check your big ego and bring in some people who are different but complement you. Watch what happens to your culture.

Manage pessimistic thinking. Focus your time and energy in areas that affect your business. Sales,

hour management, people management and productive scheduling are a must. Every hour of your day needs to be efficient. Good leaders can compartmentalize things. Work a weekly plan with clear focus. You won't have time to get emotional about issues if you're focused on daily tasks. Remember, successful leaders create a positive and inspiring workplace culture. You can't do this if you're negative and stressed all the time.

Engage your people and provide feedback.

Consistent meetings with a prepared agenda have to be a priority. Too many owners think talking on the phone three to four times a day to a manager is enough. It's not. Schedule time with your leaders and make it a priority. You are not too busy. Mix in coffee or lunch. Show people you care. Your people need direction and feedback. It's a cardinal sin to say, "I'm paying them a lot of money. They should know how to do that." What they need is your leadership.

Clearly define metrics and reward success. Leaders must communicate their specific goals and expectations. Management must be held accountable and actual results compared to budget should be reviewed regularly. When the team meets or exceeds expectations, recognize the win. Too many companies don't keep score or don't manage the right metrics.

Invest in relationships. Leaders expand their companies by investing time, money and emotions in mutually beneficial relationships. Associating with the right customers, employees and centers of influence involves planning, passion, trust and a genuine belief that time will bare results. This is a 24/7 passion, not a 9-to-5 gig a few days a month.

Remember, leadership is a learned behavior that becomes unconscious and automatic over time. Pressure and stress come with the territory, but ultimately great leaders serve as enablers of talent, culture and results. The best companies in the industry have leaders who invest in making themselves better. Get out of your old routine and go do something that helps you be a better leader. That sounds like a good New Year's resolution.