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Management, Marketing, Strategic Planning

August, 2009

The “Dog Days” Are Almost Here. Are Leaders Ready for Them?

The calendar confirms that we are approaching what, in many parts of the country, are called the “Dog Days of August” – several weeks of heat and humidity mixed with occasional cool nights which indicate we are approaching the end of Summer. It’s possible this year we may also be approaching what might be called the “Dog Days of the Recession” – a period of more bad news but mixed with a steadily growing amount of good news which indicate we are approaching the end of the Downturn and may even be starting a slow recovery.

The Dog Days of August alert us that it’s time to begin shifting our efforts and plans from surviving the heat to preparing for cooler weather. If these are also the Dog Days of the Recession – and there are indications that they are – then they are alerting top executives and senior managers that it’s time to begin shifting their efforts and plans from surviving the recession to preparing for recovery.

To accomplish this is going to require great leadership. Yet we can’t learn how to be a good leader – or a good golfer or tennis player – by just reading a book. However, we can learn *a lot* about leadership by examining the characteristics that great leaders possess. Here are some of them.

- ∞ **Vision.** Strong leaders have a vision and communicate it. Their people need to see it, hear it and live it.
- ∞ **Willingness to change.** Followers tend to resist change. Leaders welcome it and take advantage of the opportunities it presents.
- ∞ **Compassion.** Strong leaders show empathy. Followers need to see and feel this. People need to know that they matter and have a role in the success of the organization.
- ∞ **Courage.** Douglas MacArthur once said, “Courage is just fear that holds out a little bit longer. At times a leader has to make decisions that others don’t agree with. It’s part of the job.
- ∞ **Listening.** Leaders listen in order to learn and also to understand what their people are thinking and feeling.
- ∞ **Communication.** Leaders don’t expect people to read their minds. They set the example for open – and honest – communication. Furthermore, they say what they believe, not what’s politically correct.
- ∞ **Humor.** Humor can be as important in leadership as communication. When people laugh together it creates a bond that transcends the stress in a fast-paced, hectic workplace.
- ∞ **Delegation and Empowerment.** Leaders don’t dictate. They delegate responsibility – and the authority to go with it. By doing this, they empower their people, encouraging them when they succeed and supporting them if they fail.

- ∞ **Kindness.** Kindness in the workplace is too often underrated. Leaders understand that people need to be appreciated and rewarded for their efforts. Simple, heartfelt phrases like “please” and “thank you” go a long way. Kind leaders receive more cooperation, accomplish more and earn more respect. Unkind leaders are ignored.
- ∞ **Patience.** Rome wasn’t built in a day. Leaders know that and keep plugging away.
- ∞ **Accessibility.** People respond to personal interaction with their leaders. That’s why great leaders get out from behind their desks and visit with the troops. By doing so, they spread a simple but incredibly powerful message: “We’re in this together.”
- ∞ **Humility.** Leaders know they cannot succeed by themselves. They recognize that everyone in the organization has something to offer. They make it a point to give others the credit for success – and to take the blame themselves for failure.
- ∞ **Positive attitude.** A leader’s enthusiasm is contagious.
- ∞ **Example.** Leaders set the example. They don’t just “talk the talk”. They also “walk the walk.”
- ∞ **Commitment.** This is the catalyst that makes all other leadership qualities a reality.

Few of us are natural-born leaders but we can all improve our leadership skills. This list may seem long but everyone already possesses some of these characteristics. The first step in providing leadership in any company or organization is to study the traits shared by the leaders we admire. The next step is to reinforce the traits we already possess and to adopt the others. The final step is to incorporate all these traits into our daily lives.

Learning to be a great leader is a life-long process.

Robert Denney Associates, Inc. provides management, marketing, strategic planning and leadership services to professional firms, corporations and non-profit organizations throughout the United States and parts of Canada. Reports and discussions of timely issues are posted on our web site, www.robertdenney.com.

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