

Go-Getter

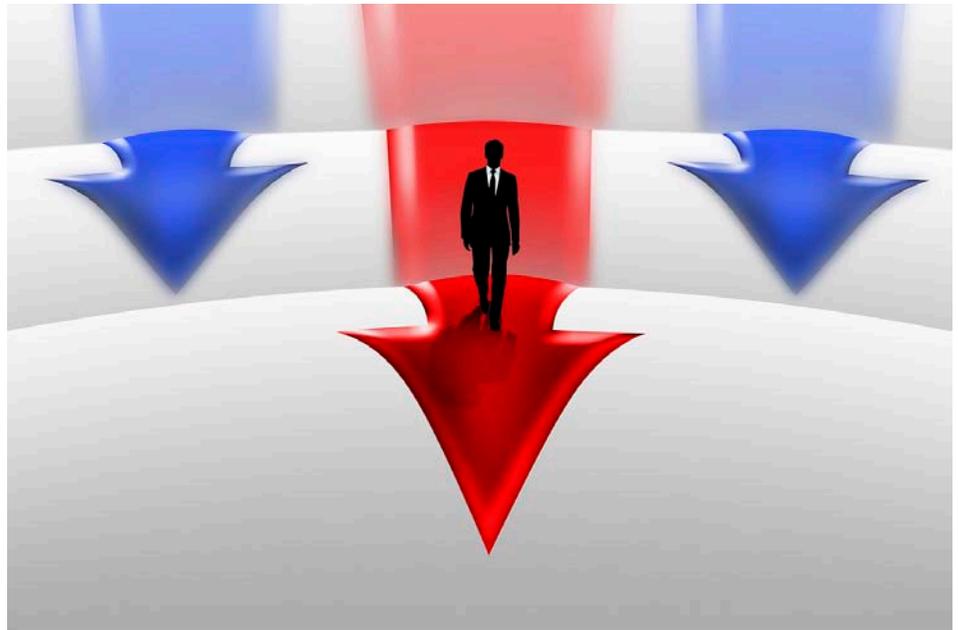
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Step Up & Be a Leader

Safety Needs You



By M.E. "Eddie" Greer

I am often asked if I feel there is a difference between a leader and a manager. My answer is always an unequivocal "yes." I firmly believe in the statement that you manage things and you lead people. This is a missing piece when it comes to leadership training for many safety professionals. Some companies provide all types of company and regulatory training and completely disregard leadership training. Then they wonder why their safety endeavors are not successful. It can be boiled down to lack of effective leadership.

Definitions

In *Developing the Leader Within You*, John Maxwell (1995) states, "leadership is influence."

In *Dare to Lead*, Byrd Baggett (2004) says, "The heroes are the leaders who realize the worth of people; those who understand the power of compassion; those who understand and value the dignity of employees. These men and women understand the wisdom of serving others and the positive influence that genuine concern for others have on the balance sheet."

Kouzes and Posner (1995) say that leadership is the "art of mobilizing others to want to struggle for shared

aspirations." The definition most used by the author simply states that "leadership is the ability to inspire others to exceed their perceived talents through guided empowerment and being enabled." It also helps if you have followers.

Qualities of an effective leader include:

- Honesty: worthy of our trust;
- Forward looking: see the big picture for themselves, workers and the company;
- Inspiring: communicate the vision;
- Competent: capable of effective;
- Character: what you are when no one else is around;
- Trust: doing what you say you are going to do;
- Servant leader: willingness to serve others;
- Strong people skills: fully understands people;
- Motivator: giving people the opportunity to grow and expand their knowledge;
- Integrity: doing what's right but maybe not popular;
- Positive influence: ability to attract the right people;
- Responsible: does not pass the buck;
- Positive attitude: ability to pass on this attitude to the right people;
- Problem solver: solver not creator;

- Desire to continue to learn;
- Time manager;
- Unselfish: gives credit to others;
- Self-discipline: follow tasks to completion;
- Change maker;
- Good listener;
- Legacy builder: growing other leaders;
- Executor: gets things done.

Surveys conducted by Kouzes and Posner (1995) 8 years apart produced the same top four results on the characteristics of admired leaders. People want leaders who are honest, forward-looking, inspiring and competent.

Expectations

What is it that we expect of an effective leader? Problem solving is the essence of what leaders do. The goal is to minimize the occurrence of problems. This means they must be courageous enough to tackle them head-on long before circumstances force their hand. Leaders must be resilient in their quest to create and sustain momentum for the organization and their people. The reality of the workplace finds leaders dealing with people

who complicate matters with their self-promotion, office politicking, power plays and ploys. Other issues are lack of resources and budgets or other circumstances that make it harder for people to be productive.

A leader must never view a problem as a distraction but rather as a strategic enabler for continuous improvement and opportunities previously unseen. There are some effective solutions to solving problems.

Promote Open Communication

Problem solving requires open, uninhibited and expected communication to allow all parties to freely express concerns and points of view. Open and effective communication happens because of a leader's ability to facilitate an open dialogue between people who trust the leader's intentions. Employees also feel that they are in a safe environment to share why they believe the problem occurred as well as specific solutions. This allows all voices to be heard and all points of view to be accounted for to allow the leader, with his/her team, to map out a path toward a viable and sustainable solution. Open communication fosters a true open-door policy.



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Remove Silos

Workplace silos that are present invite hidden agendas rather than produce efficient cross-function collaboration and problem solving. They make problem solving more difficult because the leader is more likely dealing with self-promoters and hidden agendas rather than team members fostered by a cross functional environment.

Breaking down silos allows the leader to more easily engage employees and solve problems together. It becomes more about finding resolutions and making the organization stronger and less about office politics.

Put the Right People in the Right Place

In the end, problem solving is about people working together to make the organization and the people it serves better. If you have the wrong people in critical areas, effective problem solving becomes a long and winding road of misery and failure is almost a surety.

Having the right people in place allows the organization to tackle problems head on. This is one area where effective leaders have complete control of the situation:

the selection and promotion of a company's most valuable asset, human capital.

Have a Long-Term Workable Strategy

Effective leaders connect the dots and map out a realistic plan of action in advance. They are comfortable with problem solving because they know how to gather the right people and resources, develop a budget and utilize knowledge from past experience. They fully understand that a solid strategy must be implemented to head off potential problems, create solutions and work toward a common vision.

Leaders take enough time to step back and assess the situation and the opportunities that each problem presents. They have a strategy that serves as the foundation for how the problem will be approached and managed. They are able to anticipate the unexpected and utilize the strengths of their people to ensure that the strategy leads to a sustainable solution. Effective leaders understand that they cannot shoot from the hip. Kouzes and Posner (1995) identify five practices common to personal best leadership experiences.

1) Model the way. Leaders understand if they want to encourage their employees to achieve high standards they must lead by example. They know that what they do on a daily basis wins the respect of their employees, not the fact that they have a title. They must be clear about their beliefs and what they hold true. Leaders must also communicate to back up these beliefs with action.

2) Challenge the process. Leaders serve as pioneers who are willing to step out into the unknown. They understand that there will be a change from the status quo. Leaders must be good listeners because ideas come from customers, clients, vendors and front-line employees. They must then acknowledge good ideas and act on them. These actions are the key to the opportunity door.

3) Inspire a shared vision. Leaders look across the horizon of time, imagining the attractive opportunities that are in store when they and their employees arrive at a distant destination. They have the desire to make things happen, to change the way things are, to create something that no one else ever created before. They must also know and understand themselves, their people and their industry.

4) Enable others to act. Effective leaders understand that they do not have all the answers and must rely on their team. Research shows that their success is determined by how often they use the word we. Leaders involve, in some way, all those who have a stake in the vision. From this, leaders use teamwork, trust, empowerment and enabling employees as essential elements of success.

Encourage the Heart

While the climb to success can be difficult, leaders encourage others to keep going. People become frustrated, tired and disenchanted, so effective leaders encourage their employees to carry on. Encouragement is critical to a successful business or endeavor. Great leaders know that awards given with the right spirit can build a strong team.

Be a Motivator

Motivation is something that comes from within but can be influenced by many factors. The two basic types of motivation are: intrinsic, or internally driven, and extrinsic, or outside driven.

The leaders who use positive intrinsic motivation will get employees motivated by giving them opportunities to grow or learn new tasks, gain knowledge by putting in more effort and reaching desired goals, and actually mastering specific goals or skills. Leaders instill a belief and recognition that employees can grow in their career and gain self-confidence.

Extrinsic or outside-driven motivation comes from wanting more money, competition among peers or the fear of punishment. This is definitely the wrong type of motivation and usually does not produce a long-term employee.

Conclusion

The role of the effective leaders in today's workplace is more important than ever. Safety leadership is needed at all levels to help make a difference and to ensure that all employees return home safely at the end of the workday.

Leaders must make the extra effort to select the right people for the job, and then do everything in their power to help make them successful.

Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that 4,405 workplace fatalities occurred in the U.S. in 2013. Consider the spouses, children, parents, friends and coworkers who were affected by each of these fatalities. Need anything else be said as to why we need proactive effective leaders in safety?

The bottom line is that we need people to step up and become effective safety leaders. This strategy creates a benefit from having a safe work environment and most of all allowing employees to return home each and every day. ■



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