

LEADERSHIP BEST PRACTICES FROM INDUSTRY LEADERS

Leadership may be well-defined, but the true essence of leadership is not easy to understand and implement.

By Jeremy S. Lurey, Ph.D.

The importance of leadership is unquestioned. Leaders set the vision and strategic direction for an organization. As the highest-level role models, they also set the tone and lay the foundation for the overall culture in a company.

Are we going to create a family-oriented environment that is supportive of our employees, or are we going to create a more traditional corporate setting focused on profitability and controlling costs? Do we want to be innovative and celebrate experimentation even when those efforts don't yield our intended results, or do we want to be more directive and manage to a specific quality standard?

The true essence of leadership though, still seems to elude many business leaders. This article highlights several critical leadership best practices, not merely from the author's perspective, but as shared directly from GCCA members.

What do these owner/operators, corporate executives, and next-generation leaders do – and not do – to effectively lead their organizations?

Learning from Great Leaders

While people learn in different ways and many learn best by applying and practicing new techniques, having powerful examples of great leaders offers us a vision for how we may want to be – and not be – as leaders.

For example, a key takeaway from the lives of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. or John F. Kennedy would be to stay true to your beliefs. Change doesn't happen by doing the same thing over and over again, and

sometimes it takes someone with strong convictions – not to mention the courage to share them freely – to make the difference in achieving the unthinkable.



BISHOP

When asked who her most influential leaders in life have been, **Sandi Bishop**, President of Sodus Cold Storage, recently shared that Margaret Thatcher is at the top of her list for being a dynamic leader who successfully got people onboard with her.

Bishop continued by reciting Thatcher's famous quote, "Being powerful is like being a lady. If you have to tell people you are one, you aren't!"

This plays nicely into one of Bishop's key strengths as a leader, which is to not think of herself as a leader. Bishop knows where she wants to go with her business and simply



invites her people to come along with her, as Thatcher did, rather than pushing them to join in if they don't want to.

Also, she doesn't want a bunch of "yes" men on board. Instead, she wants people who participate actively and get enthusiastic in the company's direction.

We also find role models in our personal lives. Fathers, teachers, mothers, and others tend to have a direct impact on our core values and how we live our lives.



RAUCH

Larry Rauch,

President of Los Angeles Cold Storage and past chairman of WFLO, shared that both his father Gerald Rauch and Dick McKelvey had a very strong influence on him. Rauch remembers his father specifically

stating, "All your people are important. That's how you get things done!"

Rauch, not surprisingly, has become a very people-oriented leader over the years. He believes that his staff are the most important asset for the company to be successful, and goes that extra mile to show them how much he values them. One way Rauch does this is by having lunch with a small group of employees

every month. Just getting together in the conference room to hear their ideas and listen for an hour is a different way to lead by example and demonstrate to his employees he cares about and values them.

Charlie Newell, Senior Vice President of Minnesota Freezer Warehouse Company, also had an influential mentor in the public refrigerated warehousing (PRW) industry.

According to Newell, his grandfather Duke Newell, a second-generation leader at Minnesota Freezer, once mentored Jordan Tatter, a senior executive at Hanson Cold Storage (now Hanson Logistics) early in his career. Tatter apparently returned the favor when Charlie Newell began in the industry. Tatter took time away from his own operation to serve as an ally rather than a competitor, helping him master his management reporting, among other things, over the years.

Newell shared that relationships like that keep him in the industry and inspire him to mentor those in his company and throughout the PRW industry who are just getting started.

Leadership Best Practices

Regardless of where they learned their lessons about leadership, whether it was from celebrity leaders, familiar role models, or simply trial and error, these members clearly get what it means to be great leaders. The following are

some of the leadership best practices they live by in their organizations.



BROWN

Terry Brown, President of Diversified Port Holdings, parent company of Seaonus and Portus, offers that leaders "need to do a lot more listening than talking."

For example, it's important for leaders to provide their employees with their undivided attention when they are speaking with them and avoid distractions, like incoming emails. Brown also added that this practice is not only beneficial for his associates, but also his customers, trading partners, and vendors.

It's also important for leaders to earn the trust and respect of all of these groups.

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You are less likely to gain trust if you think you have all the answers yourself and aren't listening to what your people – the ones who are closest to the actual work – have to say.

Along the same lines of respecting your employees, **Peter Corselli**, Vice President at U.S. Growers Cold Storage, shares another very important leadership practice. Corselli learned from his grandfather Frank Scherer, a familiar leader who used to be Vice President of United States Cold Storage, that one of the key roles for a leader is to, “give a man a job, and he'll step up to the plate.” And when you have the right people on your team, “Give them a bigger job, and let them step up.”

Corselli supports this philosophy by providing training to those individuals who are receptive to it and want to move up in the organization. He recognizes that not everybody is motivated by being promoted, but when you see that spark in someone who wants to progress, you need to concentrate on enabling them to do it.

Corselli also shares that it's critical to spend time with people on their level. He advises, “Get to know what motivates them and share what motivates you.” It's the casual break-room conversations, in his opinion, that allow



What does a 244 lb. Yellowfin Tuna have to do with leadership? Plenty. Peter Corselli must lead and delegate effectively so that he can go on 16-day fishing excursions with no means of communicating with his company. Building relationships is also about sharing stories, and Peter has plenty of fish stories to share and the photos to prove they are true!

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— CHARLIE NEWELL, *Minnesota Freezer Warehouse Company*

for team bonding.

This type of approach is often referred to as making deposits into someone's emotional piggy bank because they will go a long way towards gaining someone's support when you inevitably start making withdrawals down the line.

Another powerful leadership practice, according to Rauch, is to, “give credit to others where credit is due.”

Rauch recognizes that it's easy to take credit. It can be harder for a leader to be vulnerable and give credit to others at times, rather than taking credit him/herself. This can be another very effective approach to making those deposits into someone's emotional piggy bank, gaining his/her trust and respect down the line.

One of the initial requirements for a great leader is simply to have a clear self-assessment of one's own strengths. Newell states, “You need to know your own strengths to develop an effective approach for partnering with others.” Without that self-awareness, you run the risk of not leveraging your true strengths or those of others around you to the fullest extent possible., “You can't be everything to everyone,” says Newell.

As such, great leaders recognize their limits and turn to others for help rather than reaching beyond their capabilities into areas where they may potentially be weak or struggle.

What Not to Do

While it's critical to know what to do as a leader, it's equally important to know what not to do when leading a team or company.

1 Brown says, “Don't ever assume anything,” says Brown. He actually sees assumptions as a sign that a leader is getting lazy by not making the effort required to take action, even if that's just having a conversation to check that unfounded assumption.

2 Rauch recognizes that rules are important so employees understand the parameters of their work, but that “you can't be too rigid.” Rules that are too restrictive can make an employee feel disempowered.

Instead, Rauch believes you must focus on people and make decisions based on individual employees and situations.

3 Bishop believes in maintaining awareness of the individual. “You don't get anywhere trying to change people,” says Bishop. “They'll only change if they want to.”

4 Corselli advises against “flock shooting”, when it comes to taking corrective action. He explains that it's critical to pick out those specific individuals who may be having problems and address any management concerns with them directly. Targeting an entire department or group and then subjecting everyone to the same measures is not fair – or effective – when managing performance.

5 Newell reminds leaders, “not to do things that can be handled by others.” Great leaders don't revert back to doing the things they did in the past simply because they are comfortable and easy. Leaders need to focus on strategic priorities.

Final Thoughts

Leadership development can take a lifetime of learning by example and implementing best practices. Just as current leaders should be aware of their leadership style and impact on their companies, next-generation leaders should take advantage of opportunities to learn from mentors, leaders, and role models.

Up-and-coming leaders should honor the changing of the guard by learning as much as they can about what to do and not to do from these individuals.

This gives new leaders much-needed perspective before attempting to perform at a higher level. Patience is not only a virtue in this regard, but also another leadership best practice we should all follow. 🐼

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