

Good Peer Relations Enable Leadership Transitions **By Robert T. Whipple, MBA CPLP**

Despite rigorous selection criteria and intense training, Michael, an employee reporting to you, is not working out. His attitude and personal habits are fine, but you have invested heavily in his development but have come to the realization he will be better off as an individual contributor rather than a leader.

Replacing leaders is difficult and must be done with care. Michael is in the wrong position and needs to find another job, inside or outside your company, allowing him to be more successful. As his supervisor, level with him; try to preserve personal dignity, and help him find a better fit. Once an incumbent knows he will be moved, his effectiveness plummets, so take action quickly.

This process is difficult, but it can be rewarding. Incumbent leaders rarely volunteer to leave, even if they are struggling or stressed. If they are failing, they believe the situation is correctable over time. If they have problems with values, they are blind to them. It is not a happy discussion to encourage, or demand, a leader get another job. If you are honestly working to help the person, it will show and the process can be accomplished with grace.

You can provide joy and relief to a person who is in over his head. The difficult case is the person who thinks he is doing well but isn't. If this occurs, it points to a lack of reality and poor communication. Level with the person in a sensitive way to clear the air while maintaining personal dignity.

After removing a leader, I would follow up with the person a year later to see how things were going. In most cases, the person was happier in their new role and grateful to me for the change.

Your ability to outpace marginal leaders in a win-win scenario is highly dependent on your political and negotiation skills along with personal credibility in your organization. Look for a fit where this person can make a positive contribution as a leader in a different situation or as an individual contributor.

Work with other leaders at your level to uncover these opportunities. Create strong alliances with your peers and superiors. Here are several tips that will help you create the right peer-to-peer relationships.

- Treat your peers and superiors with the same respect and integrity as people in your group. Often that is a challenge because you compete with them for critical resources. The best advice is to always use the golden rule.
- Find ways to help them in ways they recognize. Visualize yourself walking around the office with a bundle of olive branches strapped to your back. Each day see how many olive branches you can give away to people would squabble with you.
- Whenever possible, be a vocal supporter of their positions in meetings. If you act like an ally, it is more difficult for them to view you as an adversary. If you think of them as the enemy, they will reciprocate.
- Go the extra mile to help them solve problems. Sometimes that means taking problem people off their hands to make a fresh start in your organization. It might mean the loan of equipment or other tangible assets. Be bountiful with your assistance.
- Foster great relationships with the key lieutenants of your peers. They have high influence and will help your cause if they see you as a friend.
- Bond with peers whenever possible in social settings. Get to know their families and their hobbies, etc. The closer you are as friends, the more they will help you at work. The basis of politics is that “friends do things for other friends.”
- You will negotiate often with peers for resources. Establish a track record of being fair and looking for the win-win opportunities. Never try to win at the other person’s expense. It will always boomerang and you will lose in the end.
- Be visible with your concessions. Demonstrate that you deal with fairness.
- Resist the temptation to “blow in” a peer when they mess up. It may feel good at the time but you have made an enemy. You can never afford an enemy if it can be avoided (and it always can.) Some people go around creating enemies to satisfy their ego, their lust for conquest or just to have fun. They don’t last very long. If a peer makes a mistake, it’s a great opportunity to help them regain equilibrium, not a time to twist the knife. Kindness pays off.
- Do not engage in e-mail battles. If a peer is less than kind in an e-mail, reflect it with courtesy and maturity. Getting into a food fight over some issue has no place in the adult world, yet you see it all the time. Be bigger than that.
- Don’t belittle, berate or embarrass people, even if they do things to deserve it. This is a test of your maturity.

- When you make a mistake or create a political faux pas, admit it immediately and ask for forgiveness. Don't try to hide your blunders.

There are hundreds of other ways to foster cooperation among your peers and superiors. They are just common sense and go back to the advice of Lou Holtz "Do what is Right." Note: the above list is not a set of tactics or manipulation of others. Following them shows your level of integrity and moral fiber. Do these things because they are right. Being effective in this arena helps you move people who are in a misfit situation and create slots for new resources in your organization.

As you bring in new people you demonstrate your values to everyone. The criteria used to evaluate candidates reflects your style. Outstanding leaders put "leadership ability" at the very top of the list when looking for new people. They understand effective leaders have to leverage themselves through other leaders. Remember: The highest calling for any leader is to develop other leaders.

*The preceding information was adapted from the book **The TRUST Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals**, by Robert Whipple. It is available on www.leadergrow.com.*

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