



## **Leaders - Get Off Your Butts**

**by Robert Whipple: MBA, CPLP**

My favorite saying is "The highest calling for any leader is to grow other leaders." Observation: There are too few outstanding leaders in this world because of the lack of great mentors to bring them along. Top level leaders are so consumed with trying to optimize performance in a frantic and messy world, that often they do not take the time out to nurture the next generation of leaders. I believe that is a huge mistake.

Three examples of leaders who understand the value of teaching leadership while performing leadership tasks are Jack Welch (when he was at GE), Warren Bennis (known as the Father of Leadership), and Ed Betof, author of "Leaders as Teachers." These leaders are individuals who model the concept of having the senior leadership not just talk about developing people but actually spend their time in the classroom doing the teaching. If more leaders understood the incredible payoff of this concept, we could multiply the number of excellent leaders in this world by a factor of 10 in a single generation.

Granted, not all CEOs have the skills required to perform well in the classroom, so this philosophy is not intended for 100% of leaders. I maintain that a higher level of personal involvement by most leaders in teaching rather than just modeling or advocating good leadership would be a significant step forward.

The people in your organization who are the best teachers of leadership are not the development staff or the outside consultants. While there is a vital role for trainers and consultants, I believe it is the leaders themselves who are in the best position to train the next generation of leaders. Too often they sit in musty budget meetings or downsizing briefings all day and never get the chance to actually pick up a marker and share their passion for leadership with their employees. What a tragedy! I believe they are abdicating their responsibility, not only to their organization, but to the broader society as well.

There are many exceptions to this observation, and these leaders should be honored for their giving spirit and their foresight. They have understood the opportunity and gotten off their butt to get out and teach rather than just perform the leadership function all day, every day, as if playing a Whack-a-mole game. I will mention just three notable exceptions here for brevity, but there should be hundreds of thousands of exceptions like this, because the simple logic is so compelling.

Jack Welch got the idea a couple decades ago and built his Leadership University at Croton on Hudson. Jack was known to say that the times he felt best about his job were when he was actually in the classroom (called The Pit) teaching the next generation of GE executives how to lead. He devoted much time and energy to this effort, and it paid off huge rewards not only for the corporation but also for a whole generation of outstanding leaders who were fortunate enough to participate at GE.

Ed Betof has written a book titled "Leaders as Teachers," in which he describes the journey to this model of excellence in the Becton Dickinson Company, a manufacturer of medical supplies and syringes. Ed was the CLO of BD working under the direction of CEO Ed Ludwig, who understood the value of having the top brass actually doing the instruction instead of relying exclusively on training professionals. For a great video describing their program you can navigate to <http://www.corpu.com/leadersasteachers/>

Probably the most famous and long term practitioner of the notion of having executives roll up their sleeves is Warren Bennis, who has been teaching leadership for over 60 years. As a leader himself for much of that span, Warren spent a good chunk of his time actually facilitating classes on leadership. He is currently still teaching and probably will until he drops. He noted: "The single most important thing I've done at USC over the past 15 years is to co-create and co-teach a course on leadership with Steve Sample (the current President of USC)."

So, if you are a highly paid executive working crazy hours doing the business of business, I humbly suggest you get off your butt and walk down the hall to where they are conducting the leadership classes for your upcoming generations of executives. Roll up your sleeves, and start sharing your philosophy of leadership. The first thing that will happen is that you will shock the suspenders off everyone in the room. Second, you will begin to realize this is a key part of your function as a leader. Third, you will come to really enjoy this activity as the high point in your day or week. You will see the immense benefits and willingly carve out time on your calendar in the future. Finally, after doing this for a while, not only will the profitability of your organization be substantially improved, but the morale of your executives will be greatly enhanced.

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