



Little Known Leadership Tip **Robert T. Whipple, MBA CPLP**

Maybe this leadership tip is in a book somewhere, but I have not run into it yet. There is a mistake that I have seen most leaders make multiple times and not realize the damage they are doing to their credibility. It has to do with the delicate time when a leader is assigned a new position and moves into a new area interfacing with different people. The first few days are critical and set the stage for how smoothly or not the transition goes. All signals sent during the first days and weeks are important as both the leader and the new constituents learn how to work together.

For illustration, let's say our leader has just been promoted from the Printing Department into the Assembly Department. The new job is in a new physical area and has a different set of people involved. The old leader has retired and left the scene, and our new leader has just brought in the first few boxes of possessions to set up his office. He is cordial to everyone and believes he is off to a great start. This is an important job for the new leader, and he wants to carry on the fine team enthusiasm he was able to accomplish in the Printing Department.

During the first couple days, he attends the normal production meetings. He frequently mentions how delighted he is to now be working in the Assembly Department. When a manager is discussing a safety issue, the new leader offers something like this, "We had the same problem over in the Printing Department, and what we did was set up a sub-team to come up with some excellent recommendations. That saved a lot of time because it could be done off line by a small group rather than have a bunch of meetings with everyone present." People in the meeting listened intently and nodded appreciatively that there was a fresh idea.

The next day, the leader was discussing the financial closing information and seemed a little uncomfortable. He said, "In the Printing Department we always just showed the data in chart form so everyone could grasp the information easily." Two hours later he was saying "In the Painting area we had special monitors to ensure the place was cleaned up well before we went home." You get the idea.

All of the ideas and policies our new leader brought up during the first two weeks were logical and helpful. Nobody in the organization would dare question why they should do these things that the leader brought from the Printing Department. However, by the end of two weeks, this new leader was so far behind the eight ball emotionally with people that it would take nearly a year to get people to really respect and trust him. Why? He was just too forthright with his innocent suggestions for improvements based on his experience in the prior job.

There is an antidote to this common problem. When I would promote or move a manager, I would ask him or her to refer to the prior job only one time in public. Once that chit was played, I suggested the new leader refrain from other references for at least 2 months. This gave the new leader the opportunity to appreciate the good things that were being done in the new area before giving a lot of suggestions for them to be more like his old area. The people never knew the difference; they just seemed to like the new guy quite a lot.

The preceding information was adapted from the book *Leading with Trust is like Sailing Downwind*, by Robert Whipple. It is available on www.leadergrow.com.

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