

Successful Supervisor Part 100

Leaving Your Legacy of Leadership

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP

The legacy left behind by a departing leader reflects the caliber of leadership. John Maxwell summed it up in “The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership”:

“When all is said and done, your ability as a leader will not be judged by what you achieved personally or even what your team accomplished during your tenure. You will be judged by how well your people and your organization did after you were gone. You will be gauged according to the Law of Legacy. Your lasting value will be measured by succession.”

Pass your legacy of exceptional leadership skills to future generations by becoming a grower of other leaders. Doing this not only helps the new generation, but it also enhances the performance of your current team.

Modeling and teaching outstanding leadership skills is the most effective way to bring your organization to the pinnacle of success and keep it there. You need to make this investment, but it is a joyous one because it enhances the quality of work life for everyone. As a leader, you will have more success, more joy, more followers, and more rewards.

When leading an organization, large or small, you can't do it all. Running the details of a business must be done through others. In large organizations, there might be thousands of others. You need an organization of trusted lieutenants to accomplish the work. To do this, you need to shift your focus from manager to teacher.

The best leaders are those who believe it is their highest calling to personally help develop the leaders who work for them. A large portion of their mindset is spent evaluating, training, and reinforcing leaders under them.

The training is not centered on classes or consultant seminars. There will be some of that, but the bulk is personal coaching and mentoring by the leader. The best leaders spend 30-50% of their time trying to enhance the caliber of leaders on their team. Why is this? When you improve the capability of leaders working for you, the whole organization is improved. You are leveraging your leadership.

In my line management role, my job title was Division Manager. I saw my function, just as I am doing in this series of articles, as “growing leaders.” Spending time and energy on that give a better return than spending time inventing new HR practices or supply chain procedures. John Maxwell, in “The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership,” called it the Law of Multiplication. He makes the distinction between developing followers or leaders as:

“Leaders who develop followers grow their organization only one person at a time. But leaders who develop leaders multiply their growth because for every leader they develop, they also receive all of that leader’s followers. Add ten followers to your organization and you have the power of ten people. Add ten leaders to your organization, and you have the power of the ten leaders times all the followers they influence. That’s the difference between addition and multiplication.”

Develop leaders in as many layers as you have under you. If there are three layers between you and the masses, then develop three layers of leaders. It is not enough to work on the group closest to you. They will get the most attention, simply by proximity and need for interface time. To be effective, you need to work at all leadership levels and make it a personal priority.

Jack Welch is probably the best example of this in industry. At his famous School of Leadership at Crotonville, he was personally involved in mentoring and coaching the thousands of leaders in General Electric. Jack believed that teaching was what he did for a living.

“It was easy for me to get hooked on Crotonville. I spent an extraordinary amount of my time there. I was in the Pit once or twice a month, for up to four hours at a time. Over the course of 21 years, I had a chance to connect directly with nearly 18,000 GE leaders. Going there always rejuvenated me. It was one of the favorite parts of my job.”

Do the mentoring and development yourself. Do not hire a consultant to do it. It is fine to have help for certain specific skills, but is a big mistake to let the professional trainers take over. Leadership development must be *your passion*, one that you take seriously enough to consume a significant part of your time. You don’t send people to a one-day seminar and expect them to come out good leaders. The combined snake oil of 100 consultants cannot transform your team into effective leaders as well as you can. Bennis summed it up as follows:

“True leaders... are not made in a single weekend seminar, as many of the leadership-theory spokespeople claim. I’ve come to think of that as the microwave theory. Pop in Mr. or Mrs. Average and out pops McLeader in sixty seconds.”

Teaching must cover all aspects of leadership. Modeling the way, as well as doing formal training, is the balanced approach that pays off. I always considered leadership training a great way to engage in serious dialog with my team about things that really mattered. I would always come away with new insights. Frequently, it felt like I was receiving more than giving. It is a way to “sharpen your own saw” while you mentor others, a real win-win.

As you use this technique, keep notes on what works best and what you are learning about leadership. Keep a file and develop your own trajectory of leadership. Share this with your team and gain further insight through the dialog. Try different situations and reactions, keeping track of your success. In other words, manage your own leadership progress. You will become fascinated with this and gain much from it.

If you are a young leader, you may not feel qualified to mentor others. My advice is to start as soon as possible anyway. Since this is part of your lifelong pursuit of leadership, the sooner you begin teaching, the more you will know. Teaching is the best way to learn something. I suggest you teach what you already know and seek to learn what you need to know. Don't come across as a know-it-all in your mentoring, especially if you are inexperienced. Rather, ask people to go on an exciting journey with you toward more effective leadership.

I hope you have enjoyed this series on “The Successful Supervisor.” I have tried to cover topics that would be helpful for incumbent or aspiring leaders at the supervisor level. I am not inclined to compress this series into a book or video series. I think it is best left to posterity as a blog series of articles that can be read and re-read and passed around to others. Best of luck to you on this wonderful journey called leadership.

This is a part in a series of articles on “Successful Supervision.” The entire series can be viewed on www.leadergrow.com/articles/supervision or on this blog.

*Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP, is a consultant, trainer, speaker, and author in the areas of leadership and trust. He is the author of four books: 1. The Trust Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals (2003), 2. Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online (2006), 3. Leading with Trust is Like Sailing Downwind (2009), and 4. Trust in Transition: Navigating Organizational Change (2014). In addition, he has authored over 500 articles and videos on various topics in leadership and trust. Bob has many years as a senior executive with a Fortune 500 Company and with non-profit organizations. For more information, or to bring Bob in to speak at your next event, **contact him at www.Leadergrow.com, bwhipple@leadergrow.com or 585.392.7763***