



Using Time Wisely

Robert T. Whipple, MBA CPLP

In the end, the only thing you really have is your time. How you spend it will determine your level of success and happiness as a leader.

The marginal leader spends most of the time in a problem solving mode. Things are not working well, and the leader desperately needs to fix things, so he works on the most pressing problem of the moment and lets the lesser issues slide to the back burner. These other issues each have a way of boiling over in their own time, so the leader is forced to do damage control eventually. There are only so many problems that can be addressed at one time, so this leader becomes exhausted and frustrated because there is never any relief.

Often, in desperation the marginal leader concludes that he needs more help from lower levels. "If I could only fix them and get them to operate as better leaders, I wouldn't have to spend all my time fixing their problems." So the boss calls in the consultants with a slick leadership-training program guaranteed to solve all his problems. Unfortunately, this usually backfires because it just takes the underlings away from working on issues, so they get worse. It is also trying to solve the problem at the wrong level. The marginal leader does not need to fix them; he needs to fix himself first.

The exceptional leader operates with trust and sails downwind. Rather than buck the wind all the time, she is operating ahead of the power curve. She spends her time on improving the culture, starting with herself. Rather than trying to "fix" the layers below her, she is intent on discovering what she can do better. Not only does this show a great example for the underlings, it also helps them see how they need to improve. That way, the training activities have higher impact. They realize the time spent "sharpening their saw" of leadership will make their work downstream much easier.

The focus of the outstanding leader is on building culture, not solving today's problems. Oh sure, there are many times when an urgent problem takes center stage. The difference is that this leader makes time every day to work on the environment. Future leaders are cultivated with the notion that their central role is to enable everyone to do his or her best. The result is that all people in the organization work to eliminate the little problems before they become huge issues. The senior leader spends much less time trying to keep people in line and more time enabling everyone to pursue the vision. Which would you rather do on a daily basis, beat people up because of the myriad of problems, or cheer on the champions of your vision?

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.

Robert Whipple is also the author of *The TRUST Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals and, Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online*. Bob consults and speaks on these and other leadership topics. He is CEO of Leadergrow Inc. a company dedicated to growing leaders. Contact Bob at bwhipple@leadergrow.com or 585-392-7763.

