



Do as I Say, Not as I Do?

Leadership Lessons

I don't know about you, but my father said this a lot. It was an instant signal to me that something had just happened that I was certainly not allowed to emulate. Or it meant that I had just done something I learned by watching that I should not have learned. Sometimes I knew better already and sometimes it was a surprise. Don't get me wrong, my father was a good role model most of the time, but the messages were not always clear and it could get pretty confusing.

What if You Don't Do as You Say?

Most everyone has worked in an environment with a bad leader. If you have, how did that feel? Did you give your all? Such an environment becomes progressively less productive and people withdraw more and more, up to and including quitting and moving to a better situation.

Here are some sobering facts from recent studies.

- 70% of U.S. employees say they are disengaged
- This is 91% in some government agencies
- Half of them are already looking for another job

- This costs \$1 trillion per year in lost productivity
- The #1 reason people feel this way is their boss and the quality of other leaders.

Most people define their impression of their company as their relationship with their direct boss. This holds true at all levels in the company.

The good news is that effective and strong leadership skills and traits can be developed. This was addressed at some length in my article in last summer in [Connections](#) magazine and in The Treer Group's February, 2013, [Management Updates](#) newsletter. Team members at all levels from Owner, CEO, COO, CFO, Manager and Supervisor can improve their leadership skills.

Six Basic Keys

There has been so very much written about leadership; do this, don't do that; this works – that does not.

Like so many things, leadership principles are simple, but oh, they are not easy. Here are mine.

1. Lead by example – This is the opposite of “do as I say, not as I do”. It is doing what you say you will do and holding others accountable to do the same. Note that



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accountability begins with you as a leader. Note also that while many define leader as the person in charge, or the highest level person in a group, I also believe that each person is able to lead from whatever position they hold. If you make a mistake and set a bad example, acknowledge it, say you are sorry and do not defend your bad behavior.

2. Communicate, communicate, communicate – Early in my management career, I was complaining to my boss that I could not understand why employees seemed to not know something that I had already clearly told them. His response was that just when we believe we have communicated extensively, we should know that our communication has just begun. This is so true. Communication is a very complicated thing. Messages must be sent and also received to count as communicated. Just telling a thing does not make it understood. In fact communication is made up of these parts – 7% words, 38% voice tones and 55% body language. It is no wonder that email can be misunderstood, and that if someone feels yelled at they do not hear the meaning of the words, or that once we hear someone’s tone of voice and

see that they are smiling, we have a better understanding of their meaning.

3. Listen ‘til it Hurts – This may be the most important part of communication. The saying that people don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care is very true. One of Steven Covey’s *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* is “Seek first to understand and then to be understood”. There are multiple lessons in this one. People have a basic need to be understood. Also, your people who do the work often understand clearly what is working and what is broken. They are often the best resource for discovering solutions; if and only if, they feel they can safely share what they know without recriminations. Listen ‘til it hurts and you will be amazed what you learn.
4. Be open and honest – People know when they are being lied to or when the truth is being bent. Don’t do it. It does not work. People also know when they are hearing the truth. Your staff and coworkers may not always like what they hear, but if it is the truth and you trust and respect them enough to share it, they are more likely to help find solutions and to contribute to efforts



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underway to improve things. Assumptions people make in a vacuum are usually much worse than the truth. If you are open and honest and encourage dissent and the sharing of ideas, so much can be accomplished.

5. Deal with the tough stuff – Bad news does not get any better by waiting. In fact, it usually gets worse. Of course remember to praise publically and correct in private. If someone is not doing their job or pulling their weight, talk to them right away. Have a professional, adult to adult conversation that lays out the problem, resets expectations, gets acknowledgment of understanding and a commitment on what will change in the future. If a supervisor (or you) has behaved badly, deal with it right away. People will respect tough action when needed, but they are demoralized and you lose some of their respect when problems are not addressed.
6. Think “we” not “me” – Organizations are stronger and more successful when everyone pulls together toward common goals. Think about two people in a rowboat pulling in opposite directions.

They may both have good reasons for heading in the direction they prefer but the boat is not going anywhere! You and your leadership team may (and should) set direction, but I encourage you to involve your team in deciding *how* to make things happen. When people feel valued and involved, they follow and help to find the best solutions. Cohesive, highly-functioning teams can accomplish anything. This is an amazing thing to watch.

Why Does This Matter?

This topic has everything to do with the type of organization you want to have. A leader sets both the direction and the tone. A leader who asks questions (and wants to hear the answers), who shows respect to everyone and listens ‘til it hurts is more likely to gain followers and produce results than one who does not.

A strong, balanced, focused organization with people all pulling the boat in the same direction requires trust, honesty and respect across the board. This usually correlates directly to top-line success and bottom-line results, to customer loyalty and employee retention.



You Can “Take it to the Bank”

Remember, lost productivity due to poor leadership cost this country \$1 trillion per year. How much of that might belong to your company? If you establish a leadership development program in your company, what might that do to your bottom line?

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