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“ROLE MODEL LEADERSHIP”

by Kenneth B. Lerman

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The most appropriate Webster’s definitions of leadership for business leaders and leaders employed in the public trust, i.e. paid with taxpayer dollars, describe a leader as someone who guides and directs others – especially in advance of or in front of those they are leading. Sounds to me like a role model for others to emulate.

For many, many years small and large universities, public and private organizations or trade and professional associations convene leadership schools and hand out leadership certificates to hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of leaders. Have you ever known a country with so many leaders – and so many leadership certificates? How many leadership certificates were on display in offices at Enron, Arthur Anderson and Martha Stewart?

Is everyone a leader? Many leadership resources are excellent at outlining and explaining government infrastructure and community board development. How much good leadership has come from it?

21ST CENTURY LEADERSHIP

Good people want to follow good leaders. Business and government should consistently present us with role model leaders who demonstrate strong moral character and courage. Examples of role model leadership and character from media celebrities are slight.

Role model leadership is not dependent on any one senior position. Role model leadership can and should be demonstrated throughout all levels and in all departments – in performance to objectives, in fairness, diversity and “civility,” i.e. the respectful behavior between

people that makes workplace relationships work.

Today there is a hunger and strong yearning for more real leadership than the “networking” results of leadership certificates. We want – *no, we need* – leaders with strong moral character and courage. How do you teach the Leadership that is born of moral character and courage? This leadership skill must be demonstrated by a leader and made visible for all to follow.

Several years ago in a one-hour keynote, I presented “Civility” for the Young Bank Officers of Kansas at their annual meeting. They invited me back and asked for a two-hour workshop on Role Model Business Leadership. Leadership that is supported by honesty, moral character and fairness, i.e. treating and respecting one another as we wish to be treated and respected.

A CUT ABOVE

This is not Pollyanna gibberish. Role model leadership based on moral character and courage takes steely strength and discipline. Many talk it. Fewer have it. True leaders hold themselves to a higher standard, whether or not anyone is watching. It is natural for a true leader to do the right thing, no matter the temptation. This conviction to do what’s right doesn’t come at the expense of business objectives or department goals. It is a very large part of them.

To not include positive workplace values in reaching business objectives is Machiavellian, old and faulty – “the ends justify the means.” Role model leaders know that attainment of business objectives by any means, without morality, is like building a house on sand.

“When the wind and rain beats on that house – great will be the fall of it.”

Smart leaders take every opportunity to promote and reinforce strong, positive workplace values. This reinforcement of strong workplace values has its return in stronger workplace performance.

CLEAN IT UP

Although turnover may not be a concern, losing higher performing talent should always concern a role model leader. Something is wrong in that department. Clean it up.

There are several items you might want to address. Double standards at any level cannot be tolerated in a value-oriented culture. No one is irreplaceable and the manager who permits and allows the double standard to continue is just as destructive to organization performance as the individual or individuals who have broken the standard.

Promotion and compensation must be performance based, not politically based. Brown-nosing is part of individual personality. Some do it better than others. Everyone wants to be liked by their boss. To reward an employee based on their “sucking up” is devastating to morale and work place performance. In my experience, it is the chief reason for higher performing talent moving on.

Minimizing the political culture and environment refocuses all employees on workplace productivity, increased performance and the attainment of specific business objectives. Organizational politics is the “destruction that wasteth at noon day.”

IS IT FAIR TO ALL?

This very brief article cannot begin to discuss all the leadership traits and skills required today.

Here is my everyday workplace touchstone that I use to guide me in my attempt to be a role model business leader – and in my family life – to help me be the man I want to be. It is from Rotary International and is known as

The Four Way Test

Of the things we think, say or do:

1. Is it the TRUTH?
2. Is it FAIR to all concerned?
3. Will it build GOODWILL and BETTER FRIENDSHIPS?
4. Will it be BENEFICIAL for all concerned?

If our country has the strength, maturity and compassion to demand political correctness – it certainly can demand demonstrable and visible moral character and courage from its role model leaders in business and government.

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