

Discover Your Inner Leader

Reflections to Inspire and Motivate You

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Cover photo by J. Taggart (Rockland Breakwater Lighthouse, Maine)

What leaders are called upon to do in a chaotic world is to shape their organizations through concepts, not through elaborate rules or structures.

[Margaret Wheatley](#)

Introduction

I am your servant. I don't come to you as a leader, as one above others.

– Nelson Mandela

Before I get into what this e-book is about, let me ask you three questions:

- 1) Do you hesitate to make decisions and second guess the ones you do make?
- 2) Do you question your ability to motivate others and to create a team climate?
- 3) Do you worry that others have more talent than you?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, or even seemed unsure, then this e-book is for you!

Each of us may put on a brave face at work, but we're all human beings, each with our unique gifts and warts. To wonder if we have the right stuff to become a leader is perfectly normal and is actually an important part of our personal learning journey.

Learning is an iterative process. We learn in spurts, not at a steady pace. Some days we're on; other days we're off. After all, we're human beings who on a daily basis face unique events—illness, loss of a family member or employment, marriage, trip to a foreign country, college graduation, etc.

As a consequence, each of us needs to figure out how to interact with the external world while simultaneously trying to manage our personal issues. For example, this could be forming a family while taking on new responsibilities at work. I've been there.

In 1989, the year my fourth child was born, I was launched unexpectedly into a manager's job. While it was within the area I had worked for seven years, the new responsibilities of not just leading a team of young economists with high expectations of their new manager, but also being a member of the regional management board, was very scary.

I worked pretty long hours but I loved my job. It was thrilling to have a lot of delegated responsibilities from my boss, the executive head. My team and I produced great information products for our clients and we constantly innovated. However, to get to that state of teamwork was a rocky journey for me. I fell on my face more times than I could count.

I had zero management training when I became manager. That training, in typical government fashion at the time, was done backwards—after I had creamed my nose enough times falling on

my face. Luckily, I adapted quickly and listened to advice from others, including my team. For example, I learned early on as a new manager that micro-managing people was definitely not cool.

I quickly learned to trust my team and delegated heavily, but always with the accompanying accountability. That approach paid off big-time.

This is but only a snippet of my personal leadership journey. This e-book is not about me, but you: how I can help facilitate YOUR journey to discovery, enlightenment and practice as an effective leader.

To do this, I've reached into my 300-plus leadership posts from my website-blog [Changing Winds](#) to share 10 popular posts on the theme of inner leadership. Along the way, I've included three short leadership profiles. Whether it's Ryan who as a young boy from rural Ontario helped dig wells in Africa, or Ray Anderson who up to his recent death was seen as the planet's greenest CEO, or the story of the sticky paws, these profiles are intended to inspire and motivate you. As you're reading, enjoy the photos I've included to help spark your reflection.

Please note that I've embedded web-links through-out this e-book. Clicking on them will take you to additional sources of information.

In the end, it's up to each of us whether we empower ourselves to embark on the learning journey to find our inner leader. It's a journey that's exciting and at times stressful. However, the rewards as you proceed through this process reveal themselves every day.

So let's get started!



*Grand Canyon, South Rim
(Photo by J. Taggart)*

GOT MY BACK? Why Promise-Keeping is Key to Your Inner Leadership

February 15, 2010

Values are like horizons. You never get there. You just keep walking towards them.

– Karen Brugler (Lutheran General Health System)

Actress and singer Pearl Bailey perhaps said it best many years ago: “You never find yourself until you face the truth.” This post delves into the core of inner leadership.

When was the last time you said to a co-worker, friend, family member, or even an acquaintance, “Don’t worry, I got your back.”

But did you?

Sure, we can say it’s a figure of speech, representative of today’s hip expressions, in effect a worthless statement of support or promise-keeping. But there’s more to this expression.

Would those who like to utter “I’ve got your back” want to admit that it’s as substantive as a balloon full of hot air? Probably not. Yes, it’s said in humor at times, such as when my 26 year-old son said it to me a few months ago. However, we both knew the context in which it was said was intended to be humorous.

I like to think that [Generation Y](#), enthusiastic purveyors of “Got your back,” generally mean what they say. Having raised four kids to Gen Y status (one of whom is borderline Gen X), I see a very different set of values than we self-indulged Baby Boomers. Gen Y does seem to be more supportive of one another than older generations.

With over three decades in the workforce and battle scars-a-plenty from downsizing exercises and office politics, I can honestly state that Boomers are not the nicest people with whom to work. To have said during my career “Hey Frank, I got your back” would have been laughed at, for we Boomers learned to excel at backstabbing, deceit and self-promotion. There were too many of us in too compressed a time period, during which it was very competitive to advance in the workplace. Unfortunately, Gen X has learned some of our bad habits, being the generation that has been forced to live in the shadow of the Boomers.

Wisdom comes only with time as we reflect upon our experiences, synthesize our learning, practice patience and move forward.

Here's a question for you to reflect upon:

To what extent would I go to back a colleague or subordinate at work if the individual was in trouble but not necessarily guilty of anything? And what would be my limits?

The greatest lessons learned as we develop our personal leadership come NOT during the easy times of economic growth and workforce expansion, but when we are under personal stress as aspiring leaders and when we are facing uncertainty. I am a testament to this, but only realized this decades later in life.

We can quickly obtain technical skills and a certain degree of knowledge. However, wisdom comes only with time as we reflect upon our experiences, synthesize our learning, practice patience and move forward. There is no other way to acquire wisdom—it's not instant pudding.

So, I ask you again: "Do you have my back?"



*Enjoying the Madawaska River, Ontario, Canada
(Photo by J. Taggart)*

Profile in Leadership: The Case of the Sticky Paws

We thought nothing of it. Paint the deck since it was starting to peel. Except something weird happened along the way. Max, our (then) five year old Lab, loved to lie on the deck, watching people pass by down below. Two days after painting it we let Max out. He sauntered out on to the deck. Then we noticed a sticking sound as his paws stuck lightly to the deck. Oh, oh. Max was not pleased. “What the heck have you guys done to my favorite place?”

Sue and I were in deep doo-doo. For the next two weeks there was nothing we could do to get Max on to the deck. We finally thought of his beloved liver treats. That seemed to work, except he was looking at us with suspicion. “What are you guys up to?” After eating his treat he dove back into the kitchen.

Sue and I were getting frustrated. That was until Lily arrived for a visit. Lily’s our oldest granddaughter (nine years old at the time). I explained to her our problem, that it was going to take time for Max to rebuild his trust to venture out on to the deck. She quickly got the message and started working with Max, gradually getting him to go on the deck and relax. As Lily said to me one evening while she was stroking Max’s head to help relax on the deck, “I’m healing Max.” Indeed she was.



So what’s my point in sharing this story with you?

It’s about leadership. Think about work situations where management broke the trust. What took months to build was destroyed in a matter of minutes. It may have been a downsizing or a merger. Whatever. It doesn’t matter the reason.

The point is that employees—PEOPLE—were hurt, or there was perceived hurt.

There are big consequences for organizations. If you destroy the trust that people have established in you, their leader, only to dismantle it without engaging them in a two-way conversation, you’re in for a very long journey of reconstruction. Along the way, productivity will plummet client service will suck.

Sue and I, with Lily’s help had to work consistently to regain Max’s trust over two weeks. Labs are highly intelligent dogs, but they also remember and are stubborn. Sounds like a lot of people I know. And yes, Max finally walked nonchalantly out onto the deck one evening. Just like the good old days.

So if you’re in a leadership position and you’re frustrated why your people are not aligned behind you, step back for a moment. The first question to ask yourself is: “Do my people trust me.

The second one is: “Are their paws sticky?”

We are the only species that follows unstable pack leaders.

– Cesar Millan (The Dog Whisperer)

Are YOU a Passionate Leader? Creating and Inspiring Your Followership

May 10, 2011

True effectiveness comes from embracing the reality and thrill of the unknown.

– Kevin Cashman

The late [Peter Drucker](#), who so strongly influenced management thinking during the 20th Century, summed it up beautifully: “I have never seen results accomplished without passion.”

How true.

I want to look at why passion is a key ingredient of a leader’s effectiveness and success. Having a broad repertoire of leadership styles is important if we’re to meet the needs of our followers.

One specific area that’s vital in our personal leadership is organizational “know-how.” This refers to the small “P” politics (how work gets done), a good understanding of the organization, and the big picture of where it’s moving and the key external influences affecting it.

However, to achieve a high level of performance as a leader, it’s next to impossible if we don’t have a passion for a cause that relies on the collaborative efforts of people.

When we speak of “walls” that inhibit collaboration, we’re referring typically to the functional silos that separate people—physically and emotionally. At a deeper level, we may even be referring to the unconscious, shared assumptions that contribute to these walls.

But there’s another level to this, and that’s the personal one: what we perceive as the safe and familiar routines with which we’re accustomed. Breaking through our personal barriers to take that leap of faith to openness, inquiry and acceptance will lead to new insights and practices.

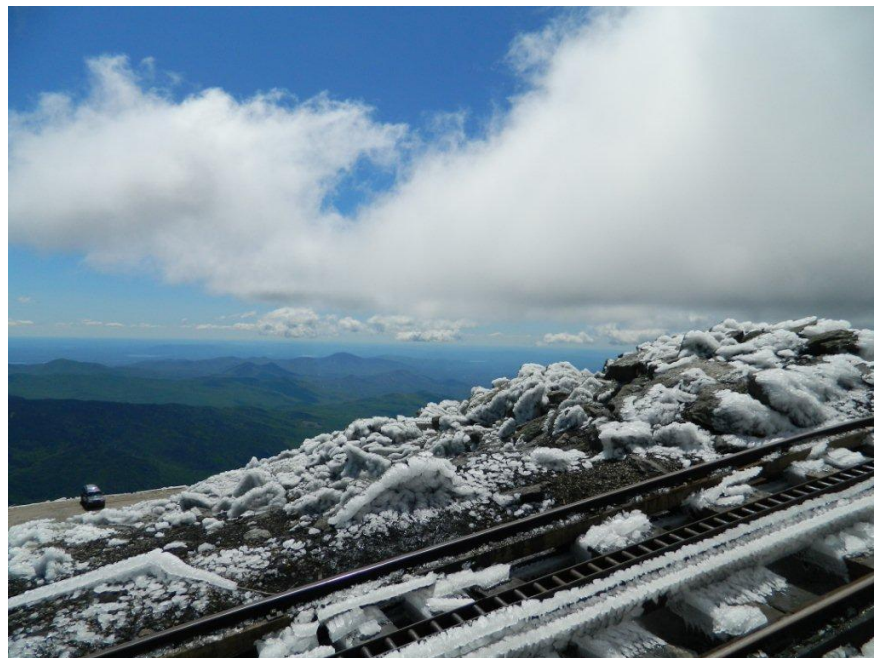
To propel an organization forward, it’s not structure and process that are key. Rather, it’s the core values and purpose of the organization. As passionate leaders, our role is to inspire and enroll our co-workers by sharing our passions and visions. What’s most compelling about this is that it has nothing to do with compliance. Instead, people feel part of a cause, but at the same time they are free to choose.

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This is an extremely important leadership lesson: the subtle yet distinct shift from compliance to enrolment. But to achieve this requires a very different approach to leadership. Having a burning passion is a prerequisite to instilling a sense of mission among your followers.

Take some time to reflect upon the following four questions as you proceed on your own leadership journey:

- 1) *When am I most energized?*
- 2) *How could I spend more time in this “state?”*
- 3) *How can I infect my followers, superiors and peers with my energy and enthusiasm?*
- 4) *When will I take the first step to live my passion?*



*View from Mount Washington, New Hampshire, USA
(Photo by J. Taggart)*

From Transactional Leadership to Reflective Leadership

December 9, 2009

We can do no great things – only small things with great love.

– Mother Teresa

“Hi Dan,” Sheila called as she poked her head into the office of one of her managers. “Are you interested in taking a two day coaching course next week? It’s aimed at helping managers become better coaches.”

“Sure, why not. Sounds good,” Dan replied. “I could learn a few tips to make myself a better coach. But to be honest, Sheila, everyone’s talking about coaching and mentoring. Just look at the shelves in the bookstores and the business sections of newspapers. Coaching’s hot stuff. Some of us were talking about this in the coffee room last week, and we basically agreed that this is probably another fad. Next year they’ll be on to something else.”

Ask yourself:

“Maybe so,” Sheila responded. “But try to go into the workshop with an open mind.”

Who am I as a leader?

“Okay,” Dan sighed. “What about you? Do you plan to take it sometime?”

Why do I behave as I do?

“Nah. I’ve been in management long enough,” Sheila said. “I’ve read some books on coaching and mentoring and have plenty of experience managing people. Besides, I’m too busy to give up even two days. Gotta run to a meeting. See you later, Dan.”

“Right...oh, and thanks,” Dan muttered, scratching his head in puzzlement at his boss’s reply.

This fictional conversation serves as an introduction to delve into the inner side of leadership. Leadership development has traditionally been based on an externalized approach: People take training courses that instruct them on the desirable characteristics, or qualities, of leaders and how they should act. Moreover, training has relied to some extent on old assumptions about leadership. In particular, the “heroic” approach to leadership (i.e., the strong individual leader) still prevails in many areas of leadership development.

It’s only in recent years that a growing portion of the literature is concentrating on leadership development from the inside out. That’s to say, getting people in formal or informal leadership positions to take a hard look at themselves: “Who am I as a leader? Why do I behave as I do?”

are questions that we need to periodically ask ourselves. When we pose these questions, it takes us to a deeper level of inquiry and reflection.

In the conversation between Dan and Sheila, each holds a different mental model about leadership (our personal set of assumptions through which we perceive the world). During their interaction, Dan and Sheila are each having unspoken conversations—what’s going on in their heads, which reflects their unconscious assumptions and beliefs.

Dan’s unspoken conversation:

“I’m still pretty new to my job as manager and feel kind of inadequate. This coaching stuff sounds good but people issues make me feel uncomfortable. I’d rather just focus on the technical parts of my job. But Sheila sure could use some training. She micro-manages all of her managers. No wonder she puts in ten hour days.”

Sheila’s unspoken conversation:

“This coaching stuff’s B.S. I know how to get people to do things, and I know the work inside-out. My managers do what I tell them to do. None of this warm and fuzzy stuff for me. I’ve worked my way up the hard way, and I didn’t need a fancy degree to get where I am.”

Sheila perceives herself as a competent director, who doesn’t need to learn a new skill. Her self-image is one of “I’m already there. Been there, done that.” But yet she is insecure with the changes underway in the organization, in particular the growing emphasis on the “soft” people skills. Her unconscious fear is leaving what’s secure and comfortable for something that requires personal insight and discovery.

Dan, on the other hand, is ambivalent. He knows down deep that to be an effective managerial leader that he has a lot of work to do. Yet he is apprehensive of the commitment he must make to go into this unknown territory. He’s not yet comfortable with having to develop a deeper understanding of himself.

One of the most difficult realizations we have as human beings is that we are never there. Even the manager who has been in her job for 15 years and knows the issues, processes and technical aspects inside out still has more to learn. What does she really know about herself?

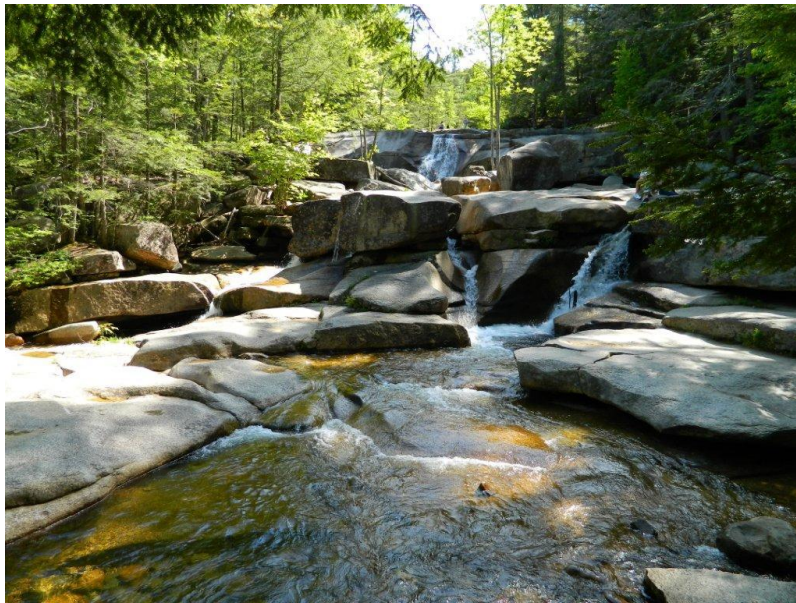
The assumptions we carry with us*call it our personal baggage*affect how we interact with others, whether it’s at work, home or in the community. These assumptions, developed and cemented from our life experiences (good and bad), form our mental models. These in turn distort our leadership lenses through which we see the world. How we lead people is affected

The leader who understands herself and who does not fear sharing her strengths, gifts, weaknesses and warts with her staff is on the path to becoming a reflective leader.

profoundly by our lenses. If a manager's lens is skewed by the debris of hardened assumptions, this makes it that much harder for him to be open to other views and possibilities.

In her book *Transformative Learning*, [Patricia Cranton](#) states:

“Adults will resist contradictions to their beliefs and will deny discrepancies between new learning and previous knowledge. In response to a challenge to their assumptions, many learners will entrench themselves even more firmly in their belief system and become hostile or withdrawn in the learning environment.”



*Diana's Baths, North Conway, New Hampshire
(Photo by J. Taggart)*

Reflect on these questions:

- How often have you seen this behavior in your organization?
- How do we get beyond this type of response by people?
- What does this mean for leadership?
- If managers, as leaders and coaches, engage in this type of behaviour, how will organizations ever take the necessary leap of faith to become more inclusive about learning?
- What do managers fear?
- And what do staff fear in expressing their leadership abilities in their daily work?

How, then, do managers transcend from a traditional, transactional approach to leadership, in which the manager negotiates with the subordinate: “Do this, and this is what I’ll give you.” Often, these are not explicit conversations, but rather implicit understandings. The employee knows that if he does ‘this and this,’ and not ‘that and that,’ he’ll receive something in return.

Does this method of “leadership” build commitment from staff? Does it enroll the individual in a common purpose and vision? Or is it oriented more towards compliance and implicit consent of not rocking the boat?

The leader who understands herself and who does not fear sharing her strengths, gifts, weaknesses and warts with her staff is on the path to becoming a reflective leader. This person understands*and values*the human dimension of leadership. It’s an inner journey, one that each of us struggles with for life. We’re never there, but continuously striving towards a personal vision of enhanced self-awareness and service to others.

This makes leadership a not-so-easy discipline to follow. The books, tapes, seminars, etc. promise great things to make us effective leaders. But leadership, the kind needed for learning organizations, cannot be sold over-the-counter. It’s not about techniques and gimmicks. When we understand that it’s about lifelong personal growth, filled with struggles and stumbles, we’ll have made one significant step forward.



*The old and the new bridges at Prospect, Maine
(Photo by J. Taggart)*

Self-Empowerment–What it REALLY Means: Are You Buzzed or Bulldozed?

May 27, 2010

Power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely.

– Lord Acton

Has your boss, or a previous one, ever said to you something along the lines of: “I’m empowering you to get this job done.” Or have you in a managerial or supervisory capacity ever said something similar to a direct report?

If you answered yes in either or both cases, how did you feel at the time? As a direct report, did you actually FEEL empowered? Or was your internal response, “yeah, right!” As a manager did making such a statement serve as a stimulant, providing a false sense of power and authority?

Leadership author and speaker [Joel Barker](#) sums it up well with this statement: “You can and should shape your own future; because if you don’t someone else surely will.”

You can and should shape your own future; because if you don’t someone else surely will.

Let’s be honest, NO ONE can empower anyone else. In the words of [Harrison Owen](#), leadership author and creator of [Open Space Technology](#), “If I empower you, to some extent you are still within my power.” These are wise words I’ve valued for 15 years since first reading them in one of Owen’s books.

One of the principal roles of managerial leadership (those in management positions who also play the necessary accompanying leadership roles) is to create the workplace conditions and space for people to carry out their responsibilities. As a sidebar, you can read an excerpt from my 2nd edition [Holistic Leadership](#) e-book where I talk about the complementary relationship between leadership and management.

When we talk about employees being creative, innovative and customer focused, then it raises the bar when it comes to how managers help bring out the best in people. Saying to someone, “I’m empowering you, Frank, to provide exemplary customer service,” or “I’m empowering you, Sheila, to be creative” is, to be frank, absolute bullshit. In reality, it’s an attempted power trip by the manager.

If, on the other hand, the manager said to Frank, “What can I do to help you in your work? What are some of the obstacles blocking you from providing the best possible service to our

customers?” then that’s a different conversation. The same applies to helping provide Sheila with the appropriate conditions in her work.

However, to be fair and realistic to management there’s a reciprocity that exists. This is where the aspect of self-empowerment enters the scene. Even when a manager understands how to draw the best from her staff, not everyone will reciprocate.

As a new manager almost 25 years ago, I gradually learned that while I had positional authority I had in fact little power. If I wanted to create a client-focused unit I was going to have to create the conditions for extraordinary things to happen. After falling down several times on my face as I made mistakes, things started to click and the energy in my unit was palpable. And we earned the reputation as being truly client-focused. However, it took a while and a lot of hard work, not just by me but the entire team, to reach this state of being.

In terms of the reciprocity aspect, there were always a couple of people in my unit over several years who were not as buzzed as everyone else. Self-empowerment is a PERSONAL decision and choice. Either someone decides to take that step or remain rooted in existing behavior. If the individual hates their job then self-empowerment is indeed a tall mountain to climb.

The next time you start to talk to your staff about how you’re going to empower them, bite your tongue. Instead, start by asking a few questions about how to improve your workplace. Then zip your lip and listen carefully and openly to what your colleagues have to say. And above all, be patient. Trust and self-empowerment were not built in a day.



*Low tide at Alma, New Brunswick, Canada
(Photo by J. Taggart)*

Profile in Leadership: Pint-Size Leadership

I live in Ottawa, the capital of Canada. There are lots of big shots here: politicians, business people, sports heroes and wannabees. The word “leadership” gets thrown around frequently when people talk about the big shots. But if you want to find a TRUE leader, you only have to drive 30 minutes south of Ottawa to a small town called Kemptville. There, you’ll find this person.

Meet Ryan Hreljac.

I recall reading an article about Ryan several years ago; however, it wasn’t until I watched the 2008 Movie [Blue Gold: World Water Wars](#) where Ryan’s outstanding work was shown.

What’s so special about Ryan?



At the age of six in 1998, Ryan learned from his grade one teacher that people were dying from the lack of clean water in developing countries. He confronted his parents about the problem and in a very focused and determined way Ryan began to raise funds to help these people. This included his doing extra work around the house to earn a whopping \$70. In 1999 his first well was built in a small village in Uganda.

This success prompted Ryan to accelerate his efforts to bring clean drinking water to peoples in Africa. [Ryan’s Well Foundation](#) was created in 2001, and over the subsequent years more than 660 wells and 715 latrines were built to provide safe drinking water and sanitary conditions for over 700,000 people.

Here are a few facts to illustrate the scope of the problem of unsafe drinking water:

- Almost one billion people lack access to safe drinking water
- Some 5,000 children under five years of age die every day from unsafe drinking water
- Over two and a half billion people do not have adequate sanitation; half have NO sanitation at all.

Now at 19 years of age Ryan has continued to expand his foundation’s work. He has visited more than two dozen countries to speak on the vital need for safe drinking water. He is recognized by UNICEF as a Global Youth Leader.

Yes, pint-size leadership can have a major, positive effect on our world. Ryan Hreljac is an incredible young man and has shown extraordinary leadership. And it all started out with a pint-sized leader at age six. Grownup leaders could learn much from Ryan.

Paddling in Organizational Whitewater: Is it Technical Skills or Wisdom that you Need to Lead?

April 26, 2011

Keep your eyes on the stars and your feet on the ground.
– Theodore Roosevelt

The past year as Canada and the United States have slowly emerged from the Great Recession has been a tough workout for people trying to cope with upheaval in organizations: increased workloads, new technologies to adopt and understand, global competition from emerging economies, the outflow of corporate knowledge from retiring Baby Boomers, trying to balance the demands of parenting and helping ageing parents, and the list goes on. For those in managerial positions, attempting to function as good leaders during this turbulence is especially stressful.

There's no shortage of advice from the experts and the countless writers on leadership. Everyone has their own angle or perspective. My purpose in writing this post is to zoom in on one particular aspect of leading people during what I'll call (as have others) organizational whitewater.

First, I'll take a moment to speak to the issue of how new university graduates from business schools have been set up for failure as leaders when they enter the real world. While a few management writers over the past few years have noted this problem, McGill University management guru [Henry Mintzberg](#) has consistently hammered away at it.

Management and leadership are intertwined, and Mintzberg explains that leaders cannot be "trained" in MBA programs; it comes only with experience – falling down, picking yourself up, learning from the experience, and then moving forward.

What has occurred in the business world is that new grads don't possess the contextual knowledge and life experiences to necessarily handle complex problems. Yes, they have acquired technical skills and a foundation for building their careers, but to say that they're ready for dealing effectively with inter-related issues affecting, for example, suppliers, customer needs, unions, staff relationships, foreign partners, and production schedules is unrealistic.

A manager cannot expect to just force his or her ideas and will upon others. While technical skills are important...to effectively lead people requires accumulated knowledge and wisdom.

One of Mintzberg's big beefs with business schools is their heavy reliance on the use of case studies. This artificial reality in his view gives graduates a false sense of capability. Learning through experience is what counts.

I'll provide an analogy that may help drive Mintzberg's point home.

In my younger years (30s and 40s) I was very heavy into outdoor recreation. One activity I loved was whitewater canoeing (I tried kayaking but didn't like it as much). I was fortunate to have excellent instructors, fellows in their 40s, who had been paddling for over 20 years. They were masters at what they did. It was inspiring to watch them navigate whitewater, displaying not just power but more importantly grace and wisdom.

In today's organizational whitewater, the message for new and less experienced leaders is to be humble, watch and listen for the signals (whitewater), and learn from your experiences.

It's not about brute strength when whitewater canoeing or kayaking. Obviously, a certain measure of technical skills is required to become proficient in the sport, but it's only one component of a bigger picture.

The same applies to organizations. A manager cannot expect to just force his or her ideas and will upon others. While technical skills are important, such as what was learned at business school, to effectively lead people requires accumulated knowledge and wisdom.

One of the most important things I learned from my canoeing instructors was that while you could learn technical skills fairly quickly, it took years and years to build a knowledge base from your experiences.

For example, there have been numerous news stories of young male paddlers who became technically proficient in handling a canoe or kayak but run into serious problems when they got in over their heads. They didn't understand well enough how to read a river or to take the time to map out a route, including identifying hazards. Patience is what's critical here, and a measure of humbleness knowing that Mother Nature deserves respect.

Unfortunately, each year canoeists and kayakers drown or become paraplegics or quadriplegics when they exceed their technical capabilities. And it's often the less experienced who end up in these situations. The message my instructors gave their students was respect the river because it is unforgiving. The same applies to organizations, especially during times of economic stress.

In the context of today's organizational whitewater, the message for new and less experienced leaders is to be humble, watch and listen for the signals (whitewater), and learn from your experiences. Of particular importance is to practice patience. Do this and you'll emerge at the other end of the whitewater a better leader and intact.

Is Work-Life Balance Beyond Our Reach?

March 20, 2011

There is more to life than increasing its speed.

– Mahatma Gandhi

How balanced are you when it comes to juggling work duties, family responsibilities (not just kids but also ageing parents), social life, physical fitness, walking the dog, hobbies, and the list goes on.

When I worked in government before hitting the eject button last December, I spent a good portion of three decades working in the leadership and learning fields. For a few years I was quite involved in the wellness area, where work-life balance had become the rage in the federal government.

I realized after a while that the work-life balance topic was not being taken seriously by senior management, despite a lot of espoused behavior. What was rewarded was working slavish hours, serving upwards and never questioning authority. Senior managers (e.g, VP equivalents) who talked about work-life balance were scoffed at.

I refocused my work and moved on. No point in pushing on a string.

True Story #1:

One senior executive I worked for a few years ago was tethered to her Blackberry. She was late forties, single and very focused on upward advancement. One of her new directors (in her fifties) shared an experience with me one morning while on the way into work. The previous morning she had been chatting to someone on the bus when her Blackberry buzzed. She ignored it. When she got into her office her boss was waiting for her, fuming. “When I email you, I expect you to immediately respond, regardless of the time.” The director got the message.

This same senior executive (who was later promoted to a VP-level position) used to tell senior policy officers that if they wanted a Blackberry (indeed they were a status symbol to have, especially showing it off in the elevator) they were expected to reply immediately when she emailed them—evenings, weekends, whenever.

True Story #2:

Another senior executive in my organization was renowned for his slavish devotion to his Blackberry. He was a very nice fellow, exceptionally bright, a workaholic and father of two young kids. What was remarkable about him was that he could chair meetings while simultaneously reading and replying to emails on his device. It was quite a spectacle to observe.

Perhaps I'm jealous. However, he certainly was a poor role model to his directors and managers. I also wonder how coherent his email replies were. And I can imagine him at home, texting with one eye while the other is paying attention to his kids.

Work-life balance, as a societal and organizational issue, has fluctuated over the past 15 to 20 years. Some companies have worked diligently at paying attention to their employees' wellbeing (e.g., outdoor gear retailer [Mountain Equipment Co-op](#), clothing manufacturer [Patagonia](#) and statistical software company [SAS](#)). In most cases, however, good intentions on work-life balance issues by senior management have often had the attention spans of budgies.

There's nothing like a good old recession, combined with the globalization of work, to pull the rug out from under initiatives dealing with human health in the workplace.



Irving Nature Park saltwater marsh, Saint John, New Brunswick

(Photo by J. Taggart)

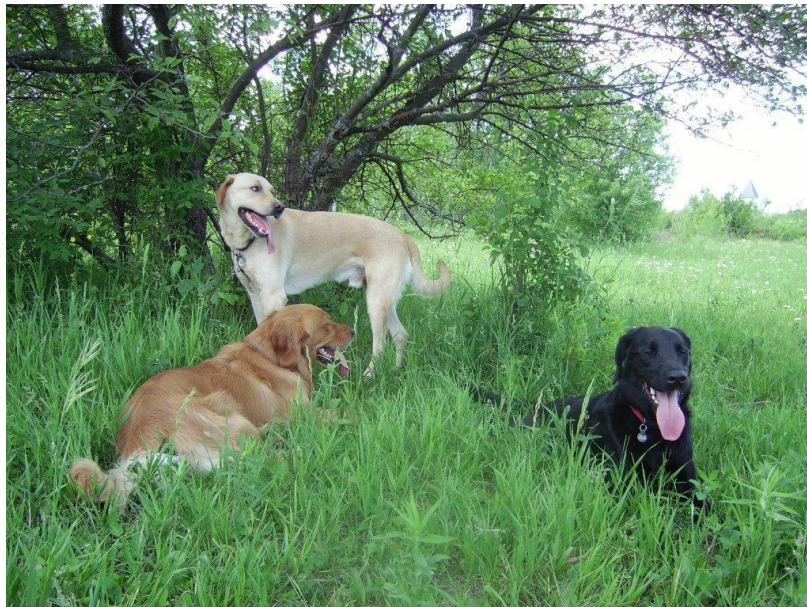
There's nothing like a good old recession, combined with the globalization of work, to pull the rug out from under initiatives dealing with human health in the workplace. After all, when you look at the working conditions in hungry-to-succeed societies such as India, China, Korea, Vietnam, Indonesia, Turkey, etc., North Americans begin to look pretty pampered.

The March 28, 2011, issue of Canadian Business Magazine had a special feature entitled "Balancing Acts." The subtitle is what is provocative: "How being 'always on' may be the secret to achieving harmony between life and work."

I can just imagine wellness experts and pseudo gurus going into apoplexy with that statement. But hold the bus. Let's see what Canadian Business is saying.

Su Grant is a senior manager of recruitment strategy with Deloitte Canada. She's connected to her team through her laptop and wireless device and argues that it's a fair deal when an employee has flexible work hours and does work during evenings or weekends. "You can't have it both ways," Grant states.

Sean Durfy, on the other hand, said goodbye to the corporate world in 2009. As the CEO of Westjet, Durfy ran the airline for two years, leading its growth to \$2 billion. In 2009, he earned a healthy paycheck of \$2.1 million; the sky was the limit. But as a guy in his early forties with a wife who had been seriously sick a few years earlier, and with very young kids who hardly knew their dad, Durfy had an awakening while attending the Vancouver Olympics. He quit Westjet and is now a stay-at-home dad.



*Max and his buddies chilling out on a hot day
(Photo by E. MacTaggart)*

BusinessWeek profiled a CEO who also packed it in. Australian Hamish McLennan, CEO and global chairman of [Young & Rubicam](#), quit his company at the age of 44. McLennan, CEO for five years, said 25 years “being a racehorse” was enough. As he stated to Diane Brady of BW: “My daughter is 13 and my son is 11....I don’t want to leave home and say, ‘Well, you had a great career, but we don’t know you.’” He continued: “At age 44, I’d rather be known as a good father than a good CEO.”

Carleton University’s [Linda Duxbury](#) is Canada’s leading researcher on work-life balance. In 2008, she and Chris Higgins (University of Western Ontario) published a report [Worklife Conflict](#), the sixth in a series of reports prepared for Health Canada. The first survey was conducted in 2001, involving almost 32,000 workers across Canada. That first report revealed that one third of the respondents said they liked flexible work arrangements.

The haphazard approach to addressing work-life balance will continue in the midst of global volatility, with some organizations “getting it” and implementing meaningful policies.

Duxbury has conducted other research on how people are trying to maintain balance with the use of wireless devices. For example, she followed 25 people for seven months who used Blackberries for work purposes. Of the 25, only four people were able to maintain tight control on when they used their devices. Most of the others used their Blackberries for work outside of office hours; however, four people used them for personal reasons while in the office.

One of Duxbury’s findings was that while the use of Blackberries changed how these people worked, their overall weekly hours of work remained the same. In another larger survey (840 workers), she found that the

average number of hours worked outside the office was seven.

Other surveys have essentially corroborated Duxbury’s finding, with workers expressing that the use of technology has either had a neutral effect on their lives or improved their productivity and in turn their lifestyles.

As much as these studies were done following statistical methodologies, there remain serious issues on just how technology is affecting how we work, collaborate (virtual versus face-to-face), raise kids and assist ageing parents. At a macro level, how is it contributing to fostering innovation, productivity and national competitiveness? These are what counts when you want to have a serious conversation on a nation’s wealth and the ability to distribute it.

In the meantime, the haphazard approach to addressing work-life balance will continue in the midst of global volatility, with some organizations “getting it” and implementing meaningful

policies, such as American Express and GlaxoSmith-Kline which ban email during weekends, evenings and holidays.

I'll close with a quotation from Sean Durfy, who was interviewed for the March 28 issue of Canadian Business magazine. Durfy explained that he's keeping up with developments in the business world by being a member of boards and staying in contact with business acquaintances. He does miss the "...game, challenge, leading people, building strategy, all that good stuff."

His final comment, however, brought it home when asked what has he learned:

"It's about putting down the Blackberry. People get comfortable working too much, or scared to quit. So many people say, 'Frig, I hate what I'm doing, and my marriage is in trouble, but jeez, I gotta work, blah-blah-blah.' My advice: If you're not happy, if you're not doing what you love, don't friggin' do it. Life's too friggin' short."

Thanks for these wise words, Sean.

Take a moment to reflect on them.



*Nubble Light House, York Beach, Maine, USA
(Photo by J.Taggart)*

Leading from the Outside-In

March 11, 2012

To move the world, we must first move ourselves.

– Socrates

The world's pretty messed up. No great insight there.

Give up trying to predict what's going to happen and instead build your ability to adapt. If you're in a leadership position, whether a formal manager or someone who takes a lot of initiative to lead your coworkers, the last thing you want to do is focus inwards.

Leading from the inside-out occurs when we hesitate to act as a result of our **mental models** (the accumulation of our life experiences and the subsequent assumptions we form about the world around us). When we lose our creativity and capacity to innovate, we end up taking the safe route. Risk-taking is avoided.

Leading from the inside-out is not the type of leadership organizations need in a tumultuous global environment. As **Thomas Paine** stated over two centuries ago: "Lead, follow or get out of the way."

It's about leading from the outside-in.

As an outside-in leader, one of your top priorities is to build the change adaptability of your team's members.

What makes leadership in the early 21st Century unique is the intersection of technology, the rapid emergence of new economies, and a population that is ageing in some countries yet showing growth of new labor market entrants in others. On top of this leadership challenge is the global culture aspect, geo-politics and growing concerns over climate change.

The above issues are part of the "unknown-knowns" that confront those who lead in various capacities. However, the much bigger over-arching issue is that of the "unknown-unknowns," future events of which we currently have no clue or idea.

Humanity has a tendency towards hyperbole and arrogance. Give a politician a podium and the amount of bullshit emanating from his or her mouth is what farmers grave. The unfortunate aspect of this is that those who espouse have no clue of what they spread far and wide. To add to our misfortune the recipients (read voters) often soak it up, either in laziness, political affiliation (read American polarized politics) or in politeness (read Canada).

So what's this leading from the outside-in all about?

To begin with, it's important to understand that it's NOT about you, the leader. It's about the organization, whether a small or large company, non-profit, or a government department. If you're in politics, it's certainly not about you but instead your constituency. Leading from the outside-in, therefore, involves serving your followers to enable them to make a positive difference in their work, regardless of whether it's in business or the public sphere.

It means that as a leader one of your key tasks is to constantly scan what's occurring in the world around you and trying to make potential linkages to your team's work.

Depending on your context, this may mean understanding your immediate community, state, province, country or global issues. And then engaging your team to explore the meaning of change, how it may affect the organization, and how best to prepare.

As an outside-in leader, one of your top priorities is to build the change adaptability of your team's members. How leadership is practiced in your team and throughout your organization is a cornerstone to achieving change adaptability. Outside-in leadership embraces shared leadership and the belief that leadership extends throughout an organization at all levels.

***Outside-in leadership
embraces shared
leadership and the belief
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*Paddling on Lake of Bays, Ontario, Canada
(Photo by S. Butler)*

Profile in Leadership: The World's Greenest CEO

Sometimes people are taken from us much too soon—people who are doing extraordinary good for the planet. Meet Ray Anderson, a businessman who did a complete turnaround in the early nineties by initiating a lifelong journey to create a company that would have no detrimental environmental impact – in fact neutral – all the while producing a profit and providing jobs to people in a wide variety of countries.

Anderson died in 2011 from cancer at age 77. Yet even at what many would consider well beyond retirement age, he was working relentlessly towards his goal of a zero carbon footprint from his flooring company, Interface Inc.



Ray Anderson grew up in Georgia during the end of the Great Depression and World War II. After graduating from college he worked for almost 20 years in industry. Then in 1973 he took the plunge, leaving his employer to form Interface, drawing on an idea, his life savings and funds from a few investors.

Today, Atlanta-based [Interface Inc.](#) is one of the world's largest flooring companies, with plants in the United States, Canada, England and Australia. However, the company's growth and evolution has been far from ordinary. In 1994, Anderson took a gamble and initiated a process to transform the company using nature as the model. (Anderson's 2009 book [Confessions of a Radical Industrialist: Profits, People, Purpose-Doing Business by Respecting the Earth](#) is excellent).

What makes Anderson such an intriguing person and exceptional leader is that he was on a never-ending quest to reduce waste and to cut emissions in order to reach a zero carbon footprint. Although employees were proud of their collective achievements, Anderson worked diligently at transforming the company's corporate culture and ensuring that all employees shared his vision. Despite low staff turnover, it was an ongoing process to ensure that the company's values remain engrained in everyone, and that new employees are quickly brought into the fold.

Ray Anderson exemplified what it means to practice stewardship and to be a true leader in enrolling and aligning employees towards a common purpose and shared vision. He set, and still is, the benchmark to which executive leaders should aspire.

The status quo is a very powerful opiate and when you have a system that seems to be working and producing profits by the conventional way of accounting for profits. It's very hard to make yourself change. But we all know that change is an inevitable part of business. Once you have ridden a wave just so far, you have to get another wave. We all know that. For us, becoming restorative has been that new wave and we have been riding it for 13 years now. It's been incredibly good for business.

– Ray Anderson

Are You a Quick Change Artist?

April 29, 2012

I learn by going where I have to go.

– Theodore Roethke

Do you like the status quo? Where you can maintain your routine at work, keep the co-workers you like, as well as a boss? If you answered yes then I have a surprise for you: you're living on some distant planet.

Stability in the workplace was more a feature of when my dad worked for Canadian National Railways and later the Government of Canada, from the late 1930s to late 1980s. I entered the job market in 1978 after college, and for the next two decades things were pretty stable. I'm not talking about recessions, stagflation, oil embargoes and other global events, but about how people worked for the same employer for many years, and had benefits and pensions.

The past decade has seen the final nail in the coffin of the employment contract: the reciprocal relationship between employers and workers. Simply stated, this was where employers provided lifelong employment with benefits, while employees were loyal to the organization, putting in a hard day's work.

That was the world of my dad and his peers. And, being an ageing Baby Boomer, that has been my world along with my cohorts. However, the winds are changing.

This artificial world began to change in the nineties, picking up steam into the 2000s. Baby Boomers at the top end (currently from about age 60 to 66) still had it pretty good. As you move down the age ladder, more of us faced forced early retirement or the boots from employers who were downsizing and outsourcing. I was fortunate, having built a career in government and bailing a year before the cuts started.

Gen X (early thirties to late forties), despite living in the Boomers' shadow for far too long, is now moving into management positions, though they're having to adapt to such issues as including rapid technology change, virtual teams and brutal global competition.

Gen Y is the generation that's getting hammered. Society has undergone an abrupt paradigm shift in the past few years: from the view that young people would be pampered by employers who would be climbing over one another to hire replacements for retiring Boomers, to today's

The past decade has seen the final nail in the coffin of the employment contract... Gen Y is the generation that's getting hammered.

reality of highly indebted, well-educated college grads who work for minimum wage, living in mom and dad's basement.

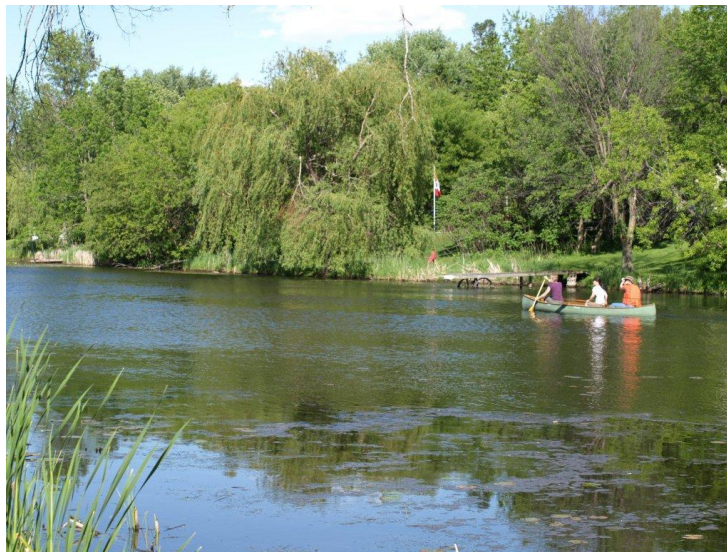
This scenario was certainly not part of the movie trailer scene that was being played out in the early 2000s by "experts." Employers would have to bend over backwards to recruit and retain Gen Y. Someone please rewind that bad movie.

***Soak in what you
experience around you,
read up on global trends
and try to learn
something new every
day.***

Now we're seeing young people battling it out with older workers, who now seem to extend to their late seventies. There's nothing like a lengthening life expectancy to broaden the labor force, while simultaneously economically hungry emerging economies are asserting themselves, giving companies more opportunities where to set up operations.

Work is outsourced, offshored and of temporary nature, paying lower wages with no benefits.

Rest in Peace, employment contract.



*Paddling on Kemptville Creek, Ontario
(Photo by J. Taggart)*

So where does that leave all of us as citizens who want to lead productive lives and to contribute to our countries' economic outputs?

Learn to control what you are able to within your sphere of influence. And perhaps the most important skill you can develop in an age of whitewater turbulence is becoming a quick change artist.

I'm not suggesting that you suddenly decide to peel off your clothes in the middle of downtown; that could bring you problems. I'm talking about learning how to watch emerging trends, synthesizing the information, and then reacting quickly to stay ahead of the pack.

For example, the past few years have seen the masses flock to social media, whether it's Twitter, Facebook, Google+, or a myriad of websites where people are expressing themselves. Many are also trying to make a buck from social media.

Keep in mind that social media is in its infancy, likened to when the telephone or radio were first introduced. Excitement, confusion, resistance are some of the reactions people had to these "new" technologies—the same with social media. Embracing change is critical. However, it's equally important to do so in a focused way.

Take time regularly to think and reflect on what it is you want to accomplish in the short and longer term. Soak in what you experience around you, read up on global trends and try to learn something new every day. Yes, each and every day.

You'll find over time that you'll be among the first to recognize and act on new opportunities. Break off that rearview mirror; it's not helping you position yourself for the future. Don't delay!



*Jim snowshoeing in Ottawa, Ontario
(Photo by S. Butler)*

Ten Valuable Lessons for Aspiring Leaders

August 17, 2009

NOTE: Everyone likes lists. For some innate reason, we humans want to have a checklist for things we should or need to do. While I've tried to restrain myself in creating lists in my leadership blogging, I'm guilty of doing so on occasion. This post and the following are two sets of lists which I hope will not prove to be checklists but rather a means to encourage your personal reflection. (August 2012)

We dance round in a ring and suppose, but the Secret sits in the center and knows.

– Robert Frost

The motivation for this post stems from my own leadership journey over the past 20 odd years, during which time I've moved in and out of formal management positions, worked as a project manager, thought leader, and economist. I learned a lot during a Masters program in leadership, including a ton of reading on new concepts and developments in the leadership field. I networked with like-minded people and soaked in what I learned.

However, many of my most powerful discoveries occurred earlier on in my career when I became a new manager. We like to talk about learning experiences, but mine were especially jarring as a young manager. But I picked myself up, dusted myself off and continued on. It's all about learning through trial and error.

The following 10 lessons are not aimed at just those who wish to move into managerial positions; they're also for those who work as project managers, team leaders, thought leaders, relationship builders, etc. And of particular note is that those holding senior positions in organizations should reflect on these lessons. It's important to remember that management is an appointment of position; leadership is earned. If you have no willing followers, then you're not a leader. You may rule through dictate and compliance as a manager, but to have a true followership means enrolling others in your vision.

So here are my ten lessons. And please note that they are not in any particular order.

- 1) **Create and nurture a learning environment** where people develop the skills and competencies that will become their toolbox for life. Don't expect traditional loyalty to the organization. As a leader, your job is to bring out the best in people and to maximize their creativity, productivity and output.

- 2) **Constantly walk the talk.** Don't be a cave dweller, hiding out in your office behind a closed door. And don't just be physically visible but be present in body, mind and spirit. Oh, and park the Blackberry!
- 3) **Show that you really care** about the people you lead and with whom you work. Don't nickel and dime people on their work hours. If you set the right tone and climate in the workplace, you'll see an impressive increase in people engagement, creativity and accomplishment.
- 4) **Develop an effective BS meter**, where you know fact from fiction, truth from hype. By avoiding getting swayed by organizational manipulators and by sticking to your values, people will respect you all the more.
- 5) **Realize that organizational cultural change is not a tactical exercise** in ticking off the task list. It's about people engagement and relationships. It takes time and patience – plenty of the latter.
- 6) **Link training and learning to job performance** and when it's needed. But it's also necessary to take the long view: investing in people for the long-term demonstrates your commitment to them.
- 7) **Be honest when you ask for feedback**, whether from small or large groups. Bringing people together at workshops, conferences, townhalls, etc. to generate ideas and recommendations, and then to ignore them, is the ultimate act of disrespect. Honour and value people's contributions.
- 8) **Focus on results.** Let people figure out how to do their work. Coach, but don't smother them. Micro-management is for the insecure, and something to avoid at all costs.
- 9) **Share the leadership.** Step back when you realize that you're not the best one to lead at the moment, regardless of how high you are in the hierarchy. Let go of your ego.
- 10) **As a leader you're also a change agent.** Be open to outcome, not attached to it. Learn to love the unknown and the opportunities and challenges it presents. Know fear; respect it; value it; transcend it.

So there you have my ten lessons for leaders at all levels. This is certainly not the definitive list of what leaders need to pay attention to, but it's a start. It will help guide you through tumultuous times, keeping you focused, energized and centered.

Ten Ways to Get Your Staff to Love – and Respect-You

OCTOBER 5, 2009

Do the thing we fear, and the death of fear is certain.

– Ralph Waldo Emerson

My last post looked at 10 Ways to Get Your Staff to Hate You. That elicited an outpouring of comments and dozens of additional ways to achieve this. I feel somewhat guilty that one of my highest numbers of views was based on a negative post.

So today, I'm pulling a 180 and presenting how you, as a manager-leader, can get your staff to love and respect you.

#10 – Get to know your staff and their families

This doesn't mean snooping or putting on a false interest, but instead showing genuine interest in those you lead.

#9 – It's okay to change your mind, but...

If you change direction, make sure that you explain clearly to your team why you did so. But it's also advisable to involve your team in setting direction, as well as when it needs to be altered.

#8 – Communicate clearly and regularly

Ensure that your team is up to date on what is going on in the organization. And the best way to do this is face-to-face. Make judicious use of email.

#7- Encourage a learning culture within your team

Show leadership by starting with yourself. Lifelong learning is not a 9 to 5 proposition; it's about how you absorb new experiences at work and through community service, training courses, assignments, reading, travel, etc. It's a reciprocal process: employers provide opportunities to learn and grow, but employees also need to engage in activities outside of work.

#6 – Maintain a careful balance between work and personal interactions with your staff

As much as it's good to do some outside socializing with your team, take particular care as manager to never be seen as creating favorites, which can occur through social activities.

#5 – Give regular feedback on performance

Be open and honest. Don't whitewash performance reviews; this doesn't help anyone and deludes people (especially newer recruits) into believing that they're doing a good job. But

acknowledge and recognize superior performance. And be sure to link performance reviews to learning activities. Performance and learning go hand-in-hand.

#4 – Make generous use of self-deprecating humor

NEVER make fun of others at their expense. This shows your own insecurity. And don't tolerate others making fun of those who may be more vulnerable. Lead by example.

#3 – Share the leadership!

Avoid micromanaging your staff. As they gain work experience and grow, keep the tension on by giving more responsibility and leadership opportunities. As manager, park your ego.

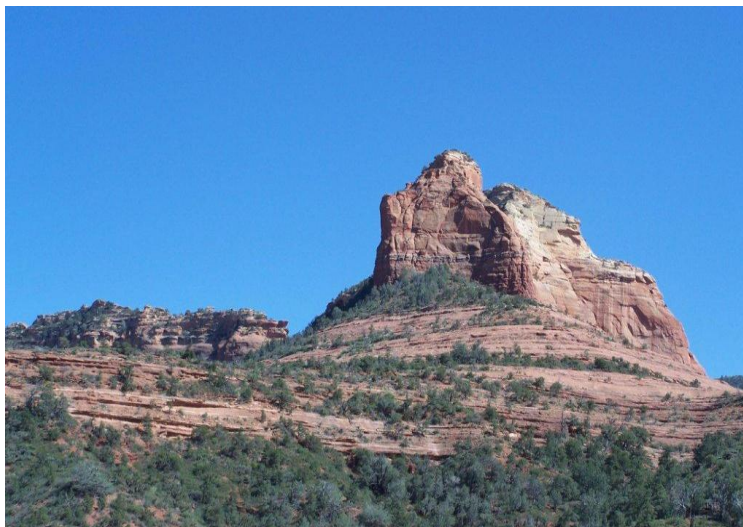
#2 – Admit when you screw up and show how you've learned from the mistake

This is a powerful way to demonstrate your leadership to your team and to underscore that you're not above them – you're a human being.

#1 – Stand behind your staff during times of difficulty

When your staff make mistakes or get caught up in organizational politics and are in trouble, don't abandon them in an attempt to cover your own ass. If you can't stand behind one of your team members, then you don't belong in management and you're certainly not a leader.

The above ten ways to gain respect from your staff is not the final list, but drawn from my personal experiences. What other ways can you suggest to earn the respect of those you lead?



*Sedona, Arizona
(Photo by S. Butler)*

Wrap Up

Fail to honour people and they fail to honor you.

– Taoist principle

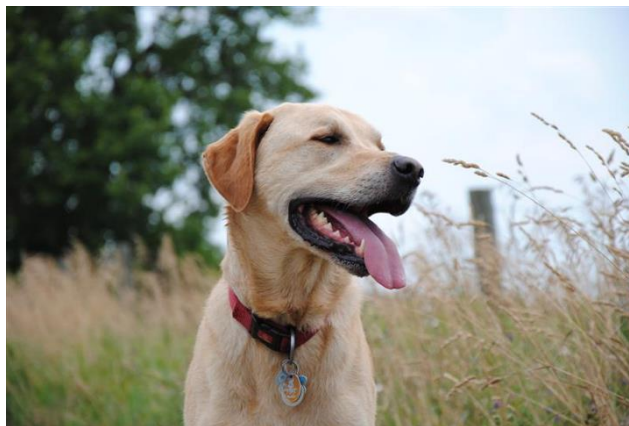
Well folks, we're at the end. I hope that in sharing 10 popular posts from my website-blog [Changing Winds](#) that I've helped spark some reflection and inquiry into your own leadership journey. When it comes to learning it's key to understand and accept that we're never there. Although I've learned a huge amount over the past 35 years in the workforce, I'm only now realizing how much I don't know. And then that's only a clue of what I'm aware.

Humbleness is a cornerstone of being an effective leader. The moment you think you're almost there as being the consummate leader who "gets it," step sideways and take a break to do some reflecting. If you're leading a team, ask them for very honest, candid feedback. The day you're capable of accepting straight-up feedback with NO animosity towards the givers, and self-initiate an action plan to address areas requiring your attention, you're on the path to great leadership.

Don't get caught up in the books, articles or blogs that shell out a never-ending river of advice. That includes this e-book. Grab ideas that provoke you, whether positively or negatively, and explore them. If your learning isn't causing you discomfort, even pain at times, then you're not really learning. Stretch yourself when it comes to trying new things, whether at work, at home or in your community.

What's at the core of this process is coming to know yourself, accepting who you are and discovering your inner leader.

So what are you waiting for?



*Max at peace with himself
(Photo by E. MacTaggart)*

***There's nothing more powerful
you can do to encourage others
in their quest for personal
mastery than to be serious in
your own quest.***

[Peter Senge](#)

About the Author



Jim Taggart is a leadership and organizational learning consultant based in Ottawa, Canada. His professional services include policy research, employee engagement, and knowledge transfer.

Jim worked for three decades with the Government of Canada. His career spanned labor market forecasting and analysis, innovation and competitiveness policy development, and leadership development and organizational learning project management.

A recognized thought leader, Jim maintains a website and blog on leadership and management issues. He holds a Master's degree in economics from the University of New Brunswick and a Master's degree in Leadership and Organizational Learning from Royal Roads University.

Visit his leadership website: <http://changingwinds.wordpress.com/>

You can contact Jim at jim.taggart@rogers.com, or through his website.



*Along the Rideau River lock system, Ontario, Canada
(Photo by J. Taggart)*