

# the Entrepreneur's Survival Guide

## ***e-update: Your Leadership Style: Inspiring Followership***

At the end of the day, the CEO has either led a team to accomplish very difficult objectives or not. Everyone knows when the company has exceeded expectations. And they know when this has not happened. With the current economic situation, CEOs can have a tough time keeping employees focused and need to ask themselves: How do I inspire people to follow me? How can employees be led - to focus most of their personal and all of their professional efforts towards achieving a company's never-changing desire for growth and improvement, in an ever-changing world?

The answers boil down to two major areas. [1] Find out what your managers and employees want and then help them achieve it, and [2] Lead by example. When I have failed to understand employees' motivations, I have failed to lead. In one instance, when I put in the 14 to 16 hour days required to lead a company, within a few weeks the normal workday of 9:30am to 3:00pm shifted to 7:00am to 6:00pm, and amazing things happened – including having even *more* fun. Long workdays don't always translate to more fun, but on tough projects or short deadlines, having employees wake up excited to come to work, make a difference, and accomplish significant goals can transform an organization. So, what should we do to encourage our employees to follow us?

- ✓ **Communicate company goals, objectives and performance.** By sharing your mission and how the company is doing, employees will buy into your increasing demands, and be better able to handle more knowledgeable customers and tougher competitors. Clear communication can couple company strategies with employee efforts. Developing a "strategies to tactics" approach unites employees and increases performance. Balancing effectiveness with efficiencies ensures resources are focused on repeatable results. Increasing communication throughout the organization provides feedback on the mission, strategies and objectives; and ensures they are in line with employees' abilities to carry out their necessary efforts.
- ✓ **Instill a sense of ownership and entrepreneurialism,** on a person-by-person and project-by-project basis. This leadership must be by example. Encouraging risks and thinking outside the box allows every person to step up to the increasing challenges of a complex world. Ownership of projects and products, and continuous process improvement, reduces turn-over. Matching responsibility with accountability, from the most senior executive to the lowest level employee, encourages employees to raise their level of performance. Balancing short-term results with a focus on the future creates constancy of purpose. Aligning core values and organizational vision with customers' needs focuses everyone on the real mission.

- ✓ **Ensure every employee is working to satisfy customer needs.** An intense customer focus moves the organization towards value adding efforts. An intense customer focus is obvious to every customer and helps your company become recognized as the preferred partner / solution provider.
- ✓ **Instill loyalty and trust** by viewing employees as the resources they are, instead of only seeing them as the costs they incur. So often, troubles with excess inventory or accounts receivable are blamed on employees instead of management, who typically are the ones responsible for the decisions in the first place. Empowered people who trust your leadership will solve very difficult problems. The days of a command and control system where all knowledge comes from the top are over. Valuing “local knowledge” as an asset to be maximized results in effectively-made, smarter decisions. Again, loyalty and trust improves the bottom line. Managing by fact, instead of politics, increases information's impact on decisions.
- ✓ **Involve and inform employees in critical company changes.** This increases their acceptance of change and leads to improvements in the changes themselves. It also increases your employees’ value by using *their* ideas to support company objectives, which increases employee buy-in immeasurably.
- ✓ **Synergize your organization, management system and resources.** Balance *who* (organization) does the work, with *how* (process) it gets done, and ensure employees are trained so they have the *ability* to increase performance. This will bolster their sense that you really do care about your employees, and will earn their long-term trust.
- ✓ **Build an environment of open interdepartmental communication.** Developing cross-functional, team-oriented employees is more difficult than it sounds. Effectively implementing this approach supports conflict resolution instead of conflict avoidance, and also breaks down internal barriers. Developing an environment of mutual respect and trust leads to creative and calculated risk-taking, and is essential to succeed in global competition. A predictive instead of a reactive operating mode provides a return on time invested by an order of magnitude! This, in turn, reduces crises management. Fun and fortune can be the result.
- ✓ **Encourage continuous personal development.** Implementing appropriate new tools and techniques can result in a huge increase in employee productivity. Just as the right tools can dramatically reduce time spent fixing a car's engine, so can the right organizational tools enhance performance. Continual organizational learning should be demanded from management. Again, outside help and support in training will provide a valuable return on investment.

*Management* is about process, projects, organizations, creating and implementing marketing and business plans, and all the other elements that go into making sure a company runs as efficiently and as effectively as possible. However, *leadership* is all about people. It is about having your employees follow you through an arduous journey to accomplish incredible objectives, while making sure everyone feels great about it. This is especially true in tough economic times.

The most exhilarating experiences occur when a disparate team pulls together to tackle an urgent and possibly corporate-life threatening situation. With the concerted effort of a well coordinated team, and the vision and leadership of a true leader, projects are completed ahead of schedule, or the new plant is up and operating in time, or the competition is blown away by a new product.

In other words, the mission is accomplished. And through inspiring “followership,” your missions can be bolder and your results even greater.

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