



Excel Leader Advisory Letter

ISSUED BY THE EXCEL LEADERSHIP GROUP

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Excel's Mission Statement

To help business leaders consistently deliver world-class results and achieve higher profits by creating their high performance, values-based culture that fully engages the talents of all associates.

Thought for June

“Do not make riches, but usefulness, your first aim; and let your chief pride be that your daily occupation is in the line of progress and development; that your work, in whatever capacity it may be, is useful work, honestly conducted, and as such ennobling to your life.”

-Andrew Carnegie



We have been discussing the critical connection between effective leadership, an organization's work culture and profitability. As we have emphasized, the main point is this: Effective leaders create high performance cultures which foster higher levels of employee engagement and discretionary effort that in turn produce world-class results and higher profits. Enlightened executives, therefore, would do well to place significant focus and resources on the recruitment, development and retention of their leadership talent in order to enhance profitability and secure a real, sustainable competitive advantage in today's global economy. We have also been discussing those dimensions or characteristics that distinguish truly extraordinary leaders from their peers. Thus far, we have touched on eight: high integrity, visioning, communication, change agent or catalyst, resilience, personal power, initiative or bias for action, and achievement drive.

Another characteristic that sets extraordinary leaders apart from their peers is empathy. The old song recorded by Joe South entitled “Walk a Mile in my Shoes” certainly is an appropriate way of looking at the concept of empathy. Empathy can also be described as sensing others feelings and perspectives, and taking an active interest in their concerns. In other words, empathy is the ability to put oneself in another's place and to take that perspective into account in one's relationship with another person. At this point, we should also make a distinction between empathy and sympathy. When I empathize with someone, I am trying to understand their viewpoint and see things from their perspective. That is different from sympathizing when I am feeling sorry for someone and their particular predicament. Here are a few coaching tips to improving your ability to empathize as a leader:

1. Listening is THE KEY. Practice quieting your mind. Put all the internal clamor that all of us experience to rest and truly listen to what the other person is saying.
2. Learn to Listen Beyond the Words. Sometimes people do not always express their true feelings or concerns directly. Listen for the feelings with which the words are being expressed. Listen for the other person's needs. All of us yearn to be recognized for who we are, acknowledged as having a legitimate point of view and included in the process. Remember that we don't have to agree, just listen, acknowledge and strive to understand.
3. Make Time for People. Every leader experiences very demanding schedules which test one's patience and ability to manage time and events effectively. That said, as leaders we must make others' concerns and feelings a top priority. We must avoid brushing people off and sending the message that we do not consider them or their issues important. Remember, as leaders, we will be judged by our actions and not our words.

4. Acknowledge What You Think You Heard. A very effective technique to use here is paraphrasing ... playing back to the individual the message as you heard and perceived it. It is a very good way to check for accuracy and understanding. Also, be sure to clarify the emotions you think are in play here by saying something like “sounds like you are feeling frustrated about this project” or “sounds like you are pretty excited about this assignment”.

I encourage you to try these steps to strengthen your ability to empathize with your team members. Let me know how they work for you. Also, if you have encountered any other “best practices” for increasing your ability to understand the perspectives of others, please do share them. Next month, we will review another critical dimension or characteristic: intentionality.

As always, I encourage readers to contact me anytime at mike@excelleadership.net with your comments and questions. Also, if Excel can be of assistance with any of your leadership challenges, please give me a call. We'll talk to you again in July. Be well and best regards.

Join our Web-based “community” devoted to open and honest discussions on topics related to leadership challenges and solutions. To join, simply visit TheExcelLeadershipGroup.net and click on “Community.”



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