

## **No Substitute for Leadership**

by Judy Z. King, ISHC

Today's workplace is chaotic and many people are frustrated. Fluctuation in business volume, the introduction of new technology, rising guest expectations, and a multitude of changes in the work force are a few of the factors creating this chaos. In the midst of it all, people need to know who they can trust and upon what they can depend. They need clear direction, the ability to put their talents and skills to work, and to be supported in their efforts. And, they want to be treated with dignity and respect, both individually and collectively.

Effective leaders meet those needs and wants, benefiting those they lead, their organization, and themselves. Our industry is fortunate to have many effective leaders and yet, unfortunately, it also abounds with poor leaders. It may be interesting to consider how those you lead would rate you on these leadership skills:

1. Makes sure that I understand expectations related to my job.
2. Is flexible in his/her leadership style in assisting me with my knowledge and skill needs.
3. Provides feedback on my performance consistently and effectively.
4. Helps me to continually improve in every task in my job.
5. Asks for, listens to, and responds to my input.
6. Communicates in a way that maintains or builds my self-esteem.
7. Speaks using specifics that are understandable, rather than using generalities that are confusing.
8. Is an effective listener.
9. Recognizes my achievements regularly.
10. Believes in me and my abilities.
11. Communicates relevant information.
12. Addresses below standard performance effectively.
13. Resolves conflict effectively.
14. Supports me and backs me up.
15. Is focused on achieving results and finding solutions.
16. Follows up and follows through consistently.
17. Makes good decisions and solves problems on a timely basis.
18. Promotes a team environment.
19. Maintains a positive attitude.
20. Is a positive role model and leads by personal example.
21. Is someone I trust and respect.
22. I would recommend my leader as someone good to work with.
23. Overall, my leader is effective.

In our experience, poor leadership is most often attributed to:

- Promotions to leadership positions being based on technical skills or longevity, rather than proficiency in leadership skills
- Limited training in leadership skills being provided due to budget cuts or a low priority being placed on training
- Hesitancy to exercise leadership for fear of losing staff in difficult labor markets
- Ineffective role models or mentors
- Having a defeatist attitude about the worth of people and their capabilities
- Expectations and performance evaluation based on “the numbers” and/or other operational issues without emphasis placed on leadership
- Multiple demands have been placed on leaders in the “do more with less” approach, often leaving little time for them to actually lead

Poor leadership leads to overall poor performance in a time when we can least afford it. To make matters worse, the toleration of poor performance leads to more poor performance as those employees we want to retain often get fed up and leave...literally or emotionally.

So, what can be done to address this common problem? We suggest three things:

1. Those in top management positions truly place a high priority on leadership and demonstrate it through their actions and words
2. Provide training in leadership skills
3. Hold leaders accountable for leading, redirecting them and rewarding them as indicated

While these solutions may seem simple, they are often not in effect in organizations, with disastrous results. When it all comes down to producing desired results, there is no substitute for leadership and developing leaders is more than worth it.

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