

# Chart Your Course... Four Principles to Give You a Leadership Edge!

(This featured guest column has been provided by Bob Garner, president of Motivate and Communicate Concepts. Known for his innovative and energetic approach to communicating ideas, Garner speaks to and conducts seminars for corporations and associations on the professional development topics of motivational leadership, teamwork, sales and service and developing on-the-job creative thinking.)

By Bob Garner

It's been said that anyone can steer a ship when the water is calm, but it takes a

leader when the storms hit. The success of the voyage will be determined by whomever is at the helm. And, so it is in business.

Presiding over every activity from problem solving to inspiring their employees,

leaders set the tone -- they set the mood -- and they are responsible for charting the collective course. It goes without saying that the quality of employees is crucial to a company's success, but those who manage departments, those who handle divisions, and those who set and oversee policies are the real determining factors. In

essence, a company is only as good as its leaders. If you lack inspired leadership, you lack inspired employees. If you lack leadership with vision and motivation, you will certainly lack motivated, goal-oriented employees.

Stew Hartman, president of Rutter's Farm Stores in York, PA, states, "Without leaders, the 'ship' will run aground. Most companies today are successful if they

have leadership with integrity -- integrity not only with employees and customers, but with the community, as well."

Conrad Stephanites, president of the Pittsburgh Division of SUPERVALU,

say next (as opposed to actually hearing what is being said to them). It's impossible to concentrate on two things at one time, and you can't hear what is being said to you if you are thinking about a response. A leader must

remember to actively listen to the needs and concerns of the people with whom he or she is dealing.

The next time you are in a "discussion," realize that the person speaking to you genuinely believes in what they are saying and is trying to communicate their concerns to you. By paraphrasing, acknowledging and repeat what they have just said. This reassures that you have not only heard, but also com-

prehend exactly what they are saying. Respond to what they have said, and proceed with the conversation. Bottom line: People want to be heard and understood -- not brushed aside...

**E - E m p o w e r m e n t .** Companies who are not leadership and teamwork-oriented do everything on a "that's your job" basis, which leads to an "I only work here" mentality. These companies tend to believe in the "carrot and stick" style of leadership.

A leader who believes in empowering his or her employees realizes that each employee could carry his or her own carrot and stick. This can be accomplished by seeking employee input, as to the direction of the department or company...or the solving of problems. This form of involvement helps to build cohesion, increase morale, and ultimately makes everyone stakeholders in the success of the corporation.

Empowerment also means sharing the leadership role, by placing responsibility on the shoulder of the experts -- the people who are actually doing the job. Hartman says, "A company cannot be run by one or two people. The individuals who are responsible for doing the job must be held responsible for the job -- and be accountable for their performance."

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**Stew Hartman, president ,  
Rutter's Farm Stores**

Inc. adds, "It is essential for any organization to have strong leadership -- if it's going to be effective and successful."

Is it possible to become a better leader? Can stronger leadership skills be acquired? The answer is yes. Because leadership is a skill, it can be learned, just like any other skill. So...here are a few principles to aid in improving your ability to LEAD.

**L-Listen.** Lyndon Johnson once said "If you're doin' all the talkin', you ain't doin' none of the listening." In Peter Drucker's book *The Effective Executive*, he states that 60 percent of the problems in corporations today are due to poor communication. In reality, communication is a two-way street, and listening must have the right-of-way. Listening to your employees, vendors, and customers will not only increase profits and customer service effectiveness, it will also aid you in becoming a better leader. If you choose to listen to what is being said to you, you will discover tremendous opportunities to enact change. Stephanites believes, "To determine a problem, you must listen. Listening is extremely important for the entire organization...not just the leaders."

Yet, from the most basic of conversations to the most complex of negotiations, people have a hard time listening, because they are trying to think of what they want to

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Likewise, empowerment involves encouraging your work force to bring new ideas to the table. Richard Zimmerman, CEO of Hershey Foods, has an empowering management style that is certainly applicable to any industry. He asks that people bring their best to work and not "park their minds" at the door. He adds if employees are willing to bring something special to their jobs and tell the company how to do things better, they will be rewarded. Zimmerman believes, "Anyone can buy the same equipment we do; anyone can put walls together; and anyone can hire a sales force. It's the people who really make a difference." Secure leaders empower their employees who, in turn, empower the company.

**A-Active.** A leader must be seen. Looking to the military, Lee, Grant, Patton and other famous generals were known for "leading from the

front." In other words, they were leaders who were out in the fields with the troops. In business, the most successful approach is "leading by example", also known as "walking the talk." That means a leader not only "says" but also "does" what he or she says.

An active leader will ask questions, remain accessible, and actually "get into the trenches." If you do this, you will discover exactly what is expected of you. Take those expectations and incorporate them into your professional life, for a leader who supports certain beliefs to his or her "public", yet privately acts in a contrary manner, will eventually lose the respect and trust of those they lead.

**D-Determination.** Every idea begins with a thought. Yet often times, even the best ideas run into obstacles. A leader should thoroughly research the "field" and have an idea in advance of what pros and cons may lie ahead. Being able to call

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great was ever achieved without enthusiasm." If you are dedicated to building-up and empowering employees, you will be able to confront obstacles --and find ways to overcome them.

Contrary to popular belief, leaders are

upon empowered employees at such times is an invaluable asset. Get their opinions and insights, for it's amazing what people who are nurtured and inspired will think up. You may enlist outside help via consultants, speakers, etc. Additionally, you may choose to research other companies and their leaders to find out what they did to correct or change situations.

Most importantly, become enthusiastic about your goal. As Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote, "Nothing

made... not born. A person who listens to his or her employees -- as well as other knowledgeable people, who has built empowerment into their workforce, is actively involved -- and is determined to be successful -- will most certainly become a more effective leader. At the helm, this type of leader can steer any ship in either calm or rocky waters... and make it successfully into port.