**Upfront Leadership**

Recalling Your Early Days of Leadership

By Kevin P. Rose

Do you remember the early days of your first formal leadership position? Were you anxious about your first meetings? Did you struggle over, “Should this be an email or a phone response?” Did you wonder what you should do the first thing when you got into the office in the morning?

As leaders grow and mature, these early questions begin to fade. I challenge you to think back to your early leadership experiences and remember the simple lessons that now seem so natural.

It is important to be exposed to the leadership “secrets” of other leaders in the organization. While we know these “secrets” aren’t secrets at all, we might not recognize or utilize them. We may miss opportunities to help others be more efficient, and perhaps more importantly, miss opportunities to build commitment and loyalty through relationship development.

Some of my earliest leadership lessons were extremely simple, but they showed that others cared about and trusted me, and they reminded me that by investing their time, leaders believed I could succeed. Here are a few ideas I recall:

1. **They took me along** – My leaders included me and introduced me to other leaders. This helped me learn who’s who in the business, and taught me the critical leadership skill of networking.

2. **They encouraged professional development** – As a new leader, I didn’t know what I didn’t know. My leaders encouraged professional development, thereby exposing me to more questions than answers. I discovered that I could find the answers once I had determined the questions.

3. **They discussed their daily routine** – They were not afraid to share how they went about their day-to-day operations. They knew that one of the greatest mysteries to new leaders is what actually goes on behind the scenes. Since this was second-nature to my leaders, they had to think about how to answer my questions. “Do you get up early to read? Do you stay up late answering emails? How do you organize your notes?” My leaders explained that each leader tweaks this according to their own style and recognized that routines change. They gently answered questions I was often afraid to ask.

4. **They exposed me to the politics of leadership** – I had always thought of the term “politics” in a negative context, but my leaders demonstrated that it does not have to be. They showed me that leaders constantly find themselves in the throes of relational dynamics, give and take, and conflict resolution. Admission or not, politics is part of leadership, and exposure to how this is handled can be a key element to a new leader’s success.

I am thankful I had a few key leaders who took the time to invest in my leadership development. I now know most of the things they shared had become second nature to them, but they realized how important it was in a new leader’s development... a few years later it is good for me to be reminded as well.

Kevin Rose serves as the Associate Vice President for Workforce Development at Northeast Texas Community College where he leads both college credit and continuing education programs that prepare individuals to enter the workforce.
George Winchester is the first and only Plant Manager of Newly Weds Foods’ Mt. Pleasant facility since it began operations in 2007. George has been in food manufacturing for 20+ years and enjoys leading startup businesses and managing them through significant growth. Married to Carolyn for 33 years, he is also the proud father of two daughters and one son.

George recently met with Leadership Focus to share some of his perspectives on leadership.

Leadership Focus: Who first challenged you to become a leader?
George Winchester: My wife, Carolyn

Leadership Focus: What is your most memorable personal leadership lesson?
George Winchester: I was a manager at another company where senior management wanted to cut costs by doing across the board staffing cuts. I questioned their reasoning and presented my own plan based on sound financial information and reasoning. My facts won the day, and I was able to change the decision from a “knee-jerk” reaction to a decision that placed the company on solid financial footing.

Leadership Focus: What book do you recommend to emerging leaders, and why?
George Winchester: NUTS by Kevin and Jackie Freiberg, the story of Southwest Airlines and Herb Kelleher. I like the many parallels to other businesses – manufacturing, cycle time, entrepreneurial perseverance, engaging employees, and overcoming obstacles.

Leadership Focus: What counsel do you give to emerging leaders?
George Winchester: You can learn from both good and bad leaders and managers. You learn “what to do” from the good ones and “what not to do” from bad ones. Focus on solving problems. Remember Apollo 13 and the famous phrase, “Houston, we have a problem.” It got everyone’s attention. Focus on identifying and defining each problem well in order to solve the right problems.

Leadership Focus: What words best describe your personal leadership style?
George Winchester: Commitment and perseverance

Leadership Focus: Thank you, George, for your time and insight!

Remembering Leadercast 2013

Andy Stanley

“With growth comes complexity, and complexity is the enemy of clarity.” Pastor, leader, and author Andy Stanley values clarity. He takes complicated things and makes them simple so that everyone knows the score. He reminds leaders in the midst of storms to recognize the confusion and complexity, step back, take a deep breath, and find clarity.

He asks three clarifying questions:  
1. What are we doing? 
2. Why are we doing it? 
3. What is my part in it?

He asks the first question of everyone involved in the situation. The head of food service might say, “We’re preparing a meal for 1,000 guests,” while the small group study leaders might report, “We’re working on good discussion questions,” and the head IT person might boast, “We’re unveiling our new system, and it’ll blow your socks off!” Since different team members have different perceptions, their answers reveal concrete realities, complexity, and areas of murkiness instead of clarity. Leaders value clarity, so they help everyone in the organization have the same answer to the question, “What are we doing?”

Stanley’s second question reveals motives and emotions behind actions. Since team members initially have different motives, leaders must harness the people’s hearts to a common purpose. When everyone in the organization understands and buys-in to “why we’re doing what we’re doing,” there is clarity.

The last question unearths team members’ expectations and reveals possible conflicts. Stanley helps team members create one-sentence job descriptions that state each member’s critical role, unique contribution, and core responsibility. This brings clarity.

Stanley reminds leaders, “The mist in your mind will eventually become a fog in your organization.” If you are experiencing that mist, take time to find personal clarity. If you can’t answer three simple questions, your organization is suffering.
Ask The Staff
How Do I Identify My Strengths?

The ancient Greek maxim: “Know thyself” is a reminder to identify your personal strengths.

Follow three principles, the E-A-R process, to identify your strengths.

Energize – Focus on those activities that energize you. What happened on those days in which you go home feeling stronger, happier, and with a bounce in your step? Focusing on activities that energize you helps identify areas of personal strength. What activities energize you? Eliminate those that drain your energy.

Ask – Ask those who know you to help analyze your personal strengths. Ask them to be honest with you in order to help you analyze what you do well and where you struggle. Be sure to ask the people from whom you can receive an honest appraisal of your strengths, not those who will only tell you what you want to hear. Remember, feedback is a treasure!

Reflect – Reflect on your work, your energy levels, and the opinions of others during the quiet moments of each day. This analysis allows you to look in the mirror of your personal gifts. Ask yourself if you are doing the most important things right now. You will see ways to build upon your strengths. When will you set aside a time for a moment of reflection?

The E-A-R process can help you “know yourself.” It will help you identify your strengths so that you can build on them in both your personal and professional activities. Perhaps, it will also help you “Know Thyself.”

Do you have a leadership question to ask the NTCC Leadership Project staff?
Submit your question to: leadership@ntcc.edu

Website Recommendation
www.greatleaderssserve.org

By Roger D. Farr

Mark Miller and his website have greatly impacted my thinking and leadership. Mark is a leader, speaker and writer, who also sells chicken by working as the Vice President for Organizational Effectiveness for Chick-fil-A.

“Great Leaders Serve” is a statement that, Mark says, “catches some leaders off guard.” The truth is the best leaders are servant leaders – those willing and eager to put the needs of the people they lead ahead of their own needs, desires, and ambition.

From a recent post, Mark was thinking about how to be more impactful in 2014. His conclusion is that he needed to “decide to do the right things vs. the nice things.”

He says knowing the difference between these two in most situations is easy, but it requires character to actually execute the right decision.

I think you will enjoy growing and learning, as I am, with Mark Miller on his leadership journey to become a great leader who serves!

Roger Farr is a chemical engineer by training and worked for 26 years in the chemical industry rising to vice-president of marketing and supply chain for a six-billion dollar corporation. He currently works and volunteers his time and experience with leaders in the faith-based and social sectors to improve their leadership and effectiveness.
Leadership Book Review

The 15 Invaluable Laws of Growth by John C. Maxwell

John Maxwell has been passionate about personal development for over fifty years. Now, in this book, he shares everything he has garnered about developing yourself so that you have the best chance of becoming the person you were created to be.

In the book's introduction, Mr. Maxwell says, “Potential is one of the most powerful words in any language. It looks forward with optimism. It is filled with hope. It hints at greatness...but what about the words, ‘unfulfilled potential?’ The phrase is as negative as the word potential is positive. Not reaching your potential is like dying with your music still inside of you.”

To reach your potential you must grow, but how do you do it? This book helps you to develop a growth plan which gives you the best chance at fulfilling your dreams and reaching your potential.

Maxwell comes out in the first chapter with the bottom line, “The Law of Intentionality - Growth Doesn’t Just Happen.” From there he not only challenges the reader to develop an actual plan for their growth, but also gives tools to get it done.

If you want to grow, personally, or as a leader, this book will be a great first step on your journey.

Leadercast 2014 Update

Rebranding: Leadercast Northeast Texas

There’s a new brand in town! It’s the same great mission, and another great speaker line-up, but a new look. As we wrote in last month’s Leadership Focus, GiantImpact, the producer of Leadercast, has rebranded the event simply as Leadercast. Chick-fil-A will continue to be a sponsor, just not a title sponsor.

GiantImpact has also given local hosts the opportunity to select a specific site name. The event sponsored by the north east Texas communities, and held at Northeast Texas Community College, is, we believe appropriately named – Leadercast Northeast Texas.

We join Keith Wilmot, President and CEO of GiantImpact, when he says, “We are so excited about Leadercast, and where it is going, and believe it can become a movement around building leaders worth following.” Make plans to join the north east Texas community at this year’s Leadercast Northeast Texas on May 9, 2014 at Northeast Texas Community College’s Whatley Center.

Leadership Focus is published monthly. Your comments and suggestions are welcome at leadership@ntcc.edu

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