



Goshen on Leadership

Communication & Ethics

Last week I was standing in line at my favorite coffee shop, when I noticed the gentleman in front of me was holding a study guide on ethics. I introduced myself and remarked that I teach leadership skills to corporations and organizations around the world and that the cornerstone of my presentation is ethics. He said that he was working on his MBA at Rice University, and the workbook was part of his curriculum. He went on to state that a recent study showed the two major challenges faced by CEOs are communications and ethics.

It doesn't take a great authority on leadership to see how ethics have dropped to an all time low. People in leadership positions have put policies over principles; they often elevate their personal success over helping those they lead become successful. We look at our political leaders, many church leaders, and CEOs and ask, "What is happening?"

Ethics is the glue that keeps an organization or corporation thriving. It is the ability to create a trustworthy relationship between the leader and those he/she leads. It is wrapped around the words integrity, honesty, character, and trust. It says I will not put myself in a position of compromise; I will advance the interests of those I am serving over my self-interest.

Today, we are witnessing the emergence of the Tea Party movement. Whether you agree or disagree with the movement, it is key to understanding how people respond when they feel their trust has been violated. The newspeople want to put the emphasis on the programs that have been created in Washington, D.C., *cap and trade, healthcare, runaway spending*, but these are surface issues. Underlying these issues is the simple truth that millions of people believe the House and the Senate have lost their ethical direction. As a CEO or leader, as a husband or father, as a wife or mother, once you remove ethics from the office, home, or marriage, you begin to lose the respect of those you have been called to lead.

Ethics are *caught* not *taught*. As leaders, we must always exemplify ethics; our words and actions must match. We must set the example and work daily to earn the trust of those under our leadership.

The second challenge in today's world of CEOs is in the area of communications. One of the hats I wear is that of facilitator for organizations to teach advanced executive leadership. In this capacity, good communication skills are essential. Leaders must be able to get their team to communicate with one another if they expect to meet their objectives. Getting a clear message out to your organization can be challenging and more so the larger the corporation or organization. As leaders, the growth of our organization or corporation is often based on our personal ability to communicate with others.

Recently, my wife and I went to a little town in the Hill Country of Texas called Gruene. It is a very old town, and one of their landmarks is the oldest dance hall in Texas. One evening we went inside this hall and listened to a quaint country western band as we watched the folks on the dance floor do what is known as the "two-step." The more I watched, the more I felt "I can do this!" So, helped by my lovely wife, we went

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out and "did our thing." It was exciting and fun, and if you find yourself in the area of Gruene, I recommend you try it. I'm not suggesting that you learn the "two-step" if you are a leader, but I want to introduce you to the "three-step," a program that will insure better personal communications. I call it Quick, Slow, Slow.

Be Quick to Listen

Slow to Speak

Slow to Debate

Over the years, it has been said, that "people do not care how much you know until they know how much you care." When you observe the great leaders of our time, you will discover that their ability to listen is key to their leadership. Allowing the other person time to present their ideas and concerns is vital. And eye contact sends the signal that you are listening, and listening is the strategic key to developing a deeper relationship with that person. How many times in your life have you been speaking to someone and realized that you do not have their total attention? Let me illustrate how ethics and trust are tied to communication. Recently, a Texas congresswoman was holding a town hall meeting in Houston. While one of her constituents stood to ask her a question, the congresswoman actually placed a call on her cell phone and began having a telephone conversation. Granted, that is an extreme example, but failing to show respect to someone who is talking to you is an insult to that person.

Second, be slow to speak. If I do not bridle my tongue, I can often speak up much too quickly. Before someone has finished making a statement, people often cut them off with their opinion. I have actually sat in key staff conference meetings and heard company presidents interrupt people in the middle of their input. It is like cutting them off at the knees when we fail to honor what someone is saying. This is worse than the cell phone caller. We need to be very slow to speak; and when we are, we must do it in a way that lets people know we understand their concerns. A good way to make people feel comfortable and know that we are listening is to repeat back to them what they shared and then give our response.

Last, don't let communication become a debate or produce emotional anger. As leaders, we must allow those we are training for leadership to offer their critiques and objections to ideas we have implemented. We cannot take their responses personally. We need to keep our communication focused on problems, not on people. A true leader does not take offense at a person who challenges their ideas or concepts; a true leader welcomes an honest debate over policies and procedures. If you respond in what I call high emotion, you are sending the signal of a command and control type of leadership, and you will eventually find yourself a very lonely leader of one, you.

As we move ahead, let's take two steps backward and examine our communications and ethics before we move three steps forward.

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