

3 **NO Cost** - Strategic Ways to Enhance YOUR Leadership Effectiveness

Answer the following question: What work related ideas, values and behaviors do you value as a leader? What do you stand for? What motivates you personally and professionally? What drives you to get frustrated or angry? In short, what is really really important to you as a leader?

Do you remember as a young child sitting on your mother's or father's lap while they were telling you a story? Perhaps it was a story about how to get along with other kids at school. Perhaps it was one of your grandparents teaching you the value of telling the truth through a story or experience that they had. Perhaps as a parent, you were with your kids driving in the car and an opportunity popped up during a conversation for you to try and make a point about doing the best you can at school/work. The point is **WE LEARN SO MUCH THROUGH STORIES!**

As a grandparent, my grandkids are always asking me to tell them a story. I love every opportunity because I know it is a chance to teach them and help them grow and learn. Sometimes it is reading a story in one of their books at bedtime with a message imbedded within the story. Sometimes the opportunity to contribute to their learning just presents itself, like it did for me just this past Saturday morning. Early in the morning, 6:00am to be exact, before everyone was up, my 8 year old granddaughter sat on my lap and told me about her week at school. I know I am biased but she is a smart kid for an 8 year old. I look forward to these moments, these precious opportunities, yet, I never know where our conversation will take us. In any case after talking for about ten minutes she shared how their class is getting ready to put on a Thanksgiving Festival Play.

She was not happy because she was playing one of the Native American Indians. I thought wow, even in 3rd grade they are using appropriate language. Anyway what was bothering my granddaughter was that she wanted to be one of the Pilgrims because "they had more words to say and better costumes". I was only on my first cup of coffee but I was awake enough to know – this is an opportunity to make a point and help her learn about getting along, fairness, the importance of interconnected roles and responsibilities and I know so much more, but hey, it was 6:30am!

I have to admit I am not one of the world's best story tellers but as we talked I shared with her a story about how the American Indians helped the Pilgrims plant corn and beans. I was not sure I was making my point, so I told her a story about me being members of a team at work where I was in a support role rather than in the lead role. In any case, 20 minutes later the whole family was up and the hectic day unfolded. Later that evening over dinner the whole family was talking when my wife asked our granddaughter what she was thinking about. She said. "I am glad I am playing a Native American in our class play ... Papa told me a story this morning about how everyone's job is important even if you are not in charge and I like corn and if the Native Americans did not teach the Pilgrims about corn we would not have any! So I am glad that at school I am playing an American Indian." I know what you may be thinking; that is not exactly the lesson I was trying to teach, but hey, she got some of my message and internalized the most important parts.

So why did I share this story? Because as leaders we have numerous opportunities day in and day out to teach the people who report to us about what is important and how to put into practice our values and guiding principles. I like the way Noel Tichy a leadership guru and professor of management has framed these opportunities. Tichy says that we are surrounded by "learning moments" that give leaders almost limitless opportunities to grow and develop the people that report to them, as well as others but only if you have a "*teachable point of view*". Think about it! If as a leader you also see yourself as a teacher and not just a boss or manager, you have opportunities every day to share "lessons". You can proactively influence the work behavior, attitudes and emotional maturity of your direct reports. The cost...

priceless as they say in the credit card commercial. So if we combine the realities that from early childhood thru late adulthood, one of the most powerful ways to learn is thru stories and leaders can leverage this powerful way to learn if they have a *teachable point of view*, we can walk away with the following:

3 Strategic Way to Enhance YOUR Leadership Effectiveness *at no cost*

OK, OK! I admit that saying these 3 Ways to Enhance Your Leadership Effectiveness at no cost is not strictly true. You can't implement these strategies without spending some focused time thinking them through and developing and practicing your message. Some leaders are so good at this they can do it on the fly ... not me. I need to think all this stuff through and I will admit I sometimes even quietly rehearse what I might say. By the way it never comes out exactly like I rehearsed it ... usually it is a lot better because I have to adapt to the circumstances! Few of us are perfect story tellers and we may never have fully developed our *teachable points of view*, but it does not matter if you're not a perfect "teacher"! ... **Doing it ... being willing to share your point of view is what matters!**

#1. Developing your own Personal Point of View on Leadership

At the beginning of this article I asked the following questions. What work related ideas, values and work behaviors are important to you as a leader? What do you stand for? What motivates you personally and professionally? What drives you to get frustrated or angry? What is really really important to you as a leader? In short, ***what is your own personal point of view on leadership?***

Think back, all the way through your working life and even further back if you can. Like most of us, you have experience good leaders, and if you are like me some really poor leaders. As you reflect back on these leaders what made them good or ineffective? What ideas and values did the really good leaders teach you? When you think back on some of the "not so good" leaders you have experience, what did they teach you? This reflection takes some time!

I can easily remember the horrible experiences, the way I was treated and how I felt while working for the "not so good" leaders. I did not like the way they treated people or their dictatorial decision making. They demonstrated that they did not care how we, as their direct reports, felt or what we thought. I have also learned a lot from very effective leaders. The funny thing is that the really good leaders I have experienced were not perfect. In fact some of them were very demanding and tough. Some were very personable and some were introverts. But I learned a ton from those very good, yet imperfect leaders. I think they "taught" me what real leadership is about. They shaped my thinking, my work values and my leadership behavior. Oh! And I also learned what not to do from the "not so good" leaders I experienced. **What about YOU? What have you learned along the way?**

My recommendation! – Work on this. Your personal point of view needs to be thought-out, formulated and heartfelt. Write it down, it is a great way to recognize what influences your own leadership style and values.

#2 Meaningful Story Telling is a Powerful and Practical Leadership Tool

As previously mentioned in this article, since early childhood we have all learned so very much through stories shared with us by our parents, grandparents and bosses. The research on how we learn is clear: one of the most effective ways for us to learn and retain what we have learned, especially for adults, is through stories and analogies. I think it is in our primeval DNA ... We learn from listening to stories and watching the behavior of our parents, grandparents and our leaders! Story telling is not easy for most of us for a host of reasons.

As I said earlier I am not a great story teller so I have found that the following “thinking it through” type questions support my storytelling:

- 1st What is the message, lesson or objective I/YOU are aiming for, i.e., what am I/YOU trying to teach ... what is my point? My personal point of view is critical here, because that usually provides the foundation underpins the point I/YOU are trying to achieve
- 2nd Can I/YOU think of personal stories from my/YOUR own experience that illuminates the point I/YOU are trying to teach? If I/YOU can, great! If not, can I/YOU think of an example/story I have been told or observed?
- 3rd If I/YOU can't think of a story to tell, can I/YOU think of an analogy that makes the point? Sports analogies work well some times, but I am not good at sports analogies so I think of analogies from raising my kids, family, nature, public events/politics or other businesses. What about YOU?

My recommendation: think hard about stories and examples that have resonated with you. Perhaps you learned some valuable lessons from stories or analogies shared with you by a Little League coach or a Girl Scout leader. Perhaps it was something you learned from a story while being on a project team with a great team leader. If you think about it you can probably remember meaningful stories shared with you by a current /former boss.

I believe if you think about your “*teachable point of view*” and how it has developed, you will recall many “*teachable*” stories. Some of my best stories and analogies come from raising my own kids and interacting with my grandkids (as you may have guessed). One thing I have learned, through trial and error, is that it is very important that you use everyday conversational words and above all DO NOT LECTURE. Be a relaxed storyteller, have fun and share your *teachable point of view* through stories that are meaningful to you.

#3 Lead/Teach by Walking Around *with a Purpose*

We have all heard of managing by walking around (MWA)... Well as one executive said to me “I am confused ... Ok, I get the idea of managing by walking around BUT for what purpose?” I hate to “walk around just to be seen”.

AH! This is the golden opportunity/*Purpose*... Don't just walk around; rather walk around looking for opportunities to teach and share your Teachable Point of View! Initiate and engage in conversations with your direct reports; see what they are up to, what is challenging them? What frustrates them? What ideas do they have for improvements or efficiencies? Don't just walk around and disrupt them rather seek out relevant work opportunities to share your teachable point of view through stories and anecdotes.

Let me share what I am trying to say with a recent example I was involved in. I was taking with a small group of employees about quality and customer service. They were frustrated by the fact that customers often are not very clear about their expectations for quality and customer service. As one of them said, “they don't know what they want!” I was hearing their frustration and I wondered if they were seeing it from the customer's point of view.

As I was listening to them, I was also thinking ... what is my point of view on quality and customer service? As I was thinking about it and listening to them, it reminded me of how delighted I am with the quality and service I get from my car dealer's service department. I know it may be rare, but I am

delighted with the quality and customer service I receive (and have come to expect) from the car dealer's service department.

So, I shared with them my "delightful experience" while bringing my car in for service several weeks ago. As I told the Service Manager, "the car seems to me like it is making a lot of noise." With an understanding look and nod of his head he asked me what I thought it was. "I have no idea" was my reply. "It just seems loud". "Can you describe or mimic the noise?" he asked. "No," was my only reply. I felt a little foolish even as I listened to myself ... "it just seems loud". Wow I thought what a great diagnostic help I am. "Don't worry," he said. "We will figure it out and fix it". To my delight they did! Turns out it was a bearing in one of the wheels and they replaced it under warranty, no less. What delighted me was not only that they fixed the problem, but how they treated me, reassured me and did not make me feel like an idiot.

"I think I get it," said one member of the group I shared the story with. "My customers may not know what level of quality and service they need. "Our job is to listen to them, reassure them of our commitment to them and then figure out how to delight them." "If we do that," I asked "what do you think will happen?" "They will give us more work" said one person. "They will be willing to act as one of our references," said another. "They will tell other folks how good we are," piped in another. You may not think this is a good example of leveraging a teachable moment, but I have to tell you that I walked away from this ten minute conversation knowing that they did *get it!* In looking back at the end of the day, I thought this was one of the best opportunities I had all day to share my *teachable point of view on delighting customers*. It did not cost me anything but a ten minute conversation sharing a personal experience.

How about you? What is your teachable point of view on leadership? What stories and analogies have you found to be helpful as a teaching leader? **PLEASE send me your thoughts and comments and we can share them with our whole community of learners!**