

The Eagle's Nest

The Heart of Leadership

By: Philip J. Lawson, Esquire

For almost thirty-eight years I have worked in Corporate America as either a Human Resource Consultant or a Management Labor and Employment lawyer. During this period of time, I have observed the leadership styles of very talented leaders. Likewise, I have observed some of the most oppressive leadership styles imaginable. The crying need in Corporate America today is good leadership by those given the opportunity to lead.

I have always been interested in leadership. More particularly, I have been interested in learning whether there is a common thread which separates the good leaders from the average, and the really great leaders from the bad ones.

Several years ago in Nation's Business magazine, writer Sharon Melton in an article titled "Leadership for the New Age," discusses leadership characteristics which will be necessary in today's world. In the article Melton discusses Anil Ninji who with his father purchased Magnet Sales and Marketing, Inc., a Culvert City, California company in 1981.

When Ninji's father died of a heart attack, Ninji shifted from leadership styles of the past. While he admired his father being energetic, committed and a good role model in many ways, his "Type A" personality tended to be erratic. "Things could change on a whim - his whim. There was fear under his father's rule." People could be called on the carpet.

Ninji desired to create a different leadership culture. "I think the most valuable things we have are energy and spirit," he said. "It's my job to try to create an environment in which these can flourish and these can be unleashed. Employees must be "energized" he related.

Employees must "feel like they've accomplished not only the business goals but their own business goals."

Entrepreneur Will Raap maintains that "nurturing will be a really important part of leadership in the future." How true this is.

The article goes on to list a number of attributes which will be needed for the leadership of the future.

SELF AWARENESS

Ninji says you must have "a clear understanding of your own personal internal core because so much of what happens outside is a reflection of that. You've got to spend some time on yourself, reflecting on what's important, making choices about who you are and how you behave, understanding where your ego starts and stops and where it's usefully employed or sublimated a bit." It's true, false pride, ego, and arrogance have destroyed careers of many potential leaders.

ABILITY TO HANDLE CHANGE, UNCERTAINTY, CHAOS, AND AMBIGUITY

In other words, being comfortable enough to lead without having all the answers. My first senior partner taught me an important lesson in this regard. After having been in the practice a year or so, I went to Ernest to discuss my doubts of continuing in the law practice. After being asked what the problem was, I related that I was uncomfortable with the substantive law, legal procedure, the court system, etc. I guess I was really saying that I didn't feel comfortable with not having all the answers. I'll never forget Ernest standing up, reaching across that beautiful wooden desk to shake my hand. He had a big smile on his face and said, "Phil, welcome to the profession. As a

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professional you must learn to be comfortable being uncomfortable.” As a leader, in working with those you lead, rarely do you have all the answers. What does help is if you have a big “heart” for those you lead.

While other characteristics of leaders were noted in this article, from my own experience I focused on three other characteristics.

A CLEAR SET OF VALUES

The article pointed out that “leadership grows out of the values the leader holds. Among them, integrity is essential. If you’re caught once, that’s one too many times, and you basically lose all your credibility. You just can’t let that ever be squandered” says Ninji. How true this is. When you walk into Walmart and see senior citizens welcoming you with their blue vests loaded down with recognition pins and their “How May I Help You?” slogan on the back, you are seeing the genius and values of Sam Walton. Although Sam Walton is no longer around, his values still drive his world-wide organization. Walmart will soon be the largest employer in the world. How did Sam Walton accomplish this? With the leader’s “heart” for his employees and a passionate vision and faith in their capabilities.

While studying leadership, I have been fortunate in being exposed to the writings of Dr. John C. Maxwell, one of the greatest “wordsmiths” in the leadership field today. Maxwell maintains that leadership “is influence, nothing more, nothing less,” and maintains that the leader that relies on his/her title or position to lead will always be disappointed. While teaching leadership, I have stated many times that in today’s world, whether it’s your spouse, your children or your employees, you cannot make anyone do anything long-term. Long-term results can only be achieved through being able to influence your employees and associates in a positive way. If you lose your credibility, you lose your ability to influence and in time you will lose your leadership position.

My father was a great leader. He was born in the coal fields of West Virginia and at the age of thirteen promised his dying mother that he would go to Berea College and get an education. Dad became a very successful business man and enriched the lives of many people. He was always teaching values to his six children and wanted each one to be successful. He wanted them to be “tax payers and not tax eaters!” On many occasions, he reminded us that success requires three elements, Inspiration, Perspiration, and the Desire to Serve Others!

TRUSTWORTHINESS

Trustworthiness is the glue which holds a team together in bad times as well as good times. A leader who has a clear set of values and the ability to articulate them well, combined with a desire to serve those he/she leads will develop a team culture of trustworthiness.

DESIRE TO SERVE THOSE YOU LEAD

Fran Rodgers, who started Work/Family Directions (now WFD) with over sixty-five million in annual revenues and more than four hundred employees made a profound statement relating to the leader’s “heart.” “When you start a business, it’s so much about you and what you want out of your life and what you want to do. Then when you start having many people working for you who really themselves care as much as you do about the mission, you feel a responsibility to be successful and to move the organization forward much beyond yourself.” How true this is. Many years ago when I hired my first attorney, Bill walked into my office carrying his daughter on his hip. The second attorney, Gary, drove into town wearing a sweatband and driving a U-HAUL truck. With every privilege goes a corresponding responsibility. I began to realize the awesome responsibility that went along with being a leader. My goal

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was to make them successful before worrying about my own success. Today, Bill's daughter is a successful teacher and loving wife. In September, Gary's daughter entered her freshman year at Princeton University. I'm proud that they have been blessed just as I have been blessed with the value they have added to my life and to our firm.

I have not been modest about asking that each and every individual who has ever worked for our firm, including partners, associates, and our professional staff be blessed. We value the contributions of each individual and strive to maximize the individual talents of each one. We have learned the important lesson that we cannot take the firm to higher levels without taking each and every team member to higher levels. The synergy that is created when each team member knows that fellow team members are interested in their individual success and value their contribution is awesome.

A leader must have a "heart" for those he/she leads. It's possible that someone might have a heart for people and not have a particularly great "gift" for leadership. However, I have never seen a great leader who did not have a heart for people.

It's the heart that makes great leaders. If you have no heart for those whom you supervise, you will not go the second mile for them and they will not go the second mile for you. As Maxwell has so ably stated "You will never have a servant's spirit toward people unless you have what I call the leader's heart - a passion for maximizing the talents of those around you." Good leaders know that ultimately their level of success will be determined by those they serve.

Not everyone is fortunate enough to live their dreams. I have been able to live and reach my dreams by helping others succeed first. Having a "heart" for others is a gift that should not be wasted. When used wisely, it will bring

unimaginable blessings to you and those you serve!

About the Author

PHILIP J. LAWSON, was founding and Senior Counsel of the Tennessee offices of Wimberly Lawson Seale Wright & Daves, PLLC, Knoxville, Tennessee. Mr. Lawson retired from the practice of law in December, 2004. His labor and employment law practice included an emphasis in union avoidance, collective bargaining, contract administration, arbitration law, federal wage and hour compliance, human resource management, dispute resolution, and strategic approaches to employee relations. Mr. Lawson received his Bachelor of Science degree in 1965 from East Tennessee State University, and his Doctor of Jurisprudence degree in 1975 from the University of Tennessee. Mr. Lawson has lectured and taught widely on a variety of aspects of labor law and leadership.



Note from Publication Committee:

Attorney Phil Lawson promotes the "Eagle" as the power and beauty that is in all of us, and to use these traits to soar like an Eagle.

At the time the Publication Committee made the decision to inquire as to whether or not Mr. Lawson would agree to publish an article in each edition of The Liaison, we decided that in light of his love for Eagles and the meaning the Eagle has in our Country, we would name Mr. Lawson's section, "The Eagle's Nest". We are proud to announce that Mr. Lawson has agreed to publish an article in each edition of The Liaison, and we thank him for his contribution to our association.