

leadership instalments

Loyalty In Leadership

By Dan Gaynor

I've been thinking about loyalty lately. More specifically, about this facet of the relationship between a senior leader and the subordinate leaders he or she chooses to work with. When I think about the people who served on my leadership teams, two key adjectives come to mind: loyalty and dedication. Yet it seems to me that so many leaders settle for far less. So many seem content with technical competence. I would suggest this compromise leads to a host of problems. The relationships between a senior executive and his or her subordinate leaders should be very strong and dedicated.

Senior leaders should populate their leadership ranks with people they have full confidence in. When a new leader takes the helm, he or she must determine who on the leadership team will meet this test. Real leadership is challenging work, it is always game changing, and often entails hardship. Subordinates who are not fully dedicated to the man or woman they work for will not deliver when it's needed most. They may go through the motions, but they won't go the extra mile.

Like all other facets of leadership, the team always reflects the leader. There are specific things skilled leaders do to create a loyal and dedicated leadership team:

Accept nothing less. I know this sounds direct, but if you are willing to accept a lower standard, you will most surely get one. Loyalty and dedication must be the conditions of membership. Bring a strong compelling vision for something better. The right leaders, the ones you should surround yourself with, want to be part of creating a great team and pursuing a good mission, so introduce and champion this with passion.

Commit to subordinates. Commitment and loyalty are two-way streets. If you want commitment from those you lead, you must first demonstrate it in your commitment to them. Make it clear that you are in their corner, working to support and advance their interests in any way you can. Become the mentor they are hoping for. All great leaders are enthusiastic teachers. When you take the time to teach, you demonstrate a genuine interest in the leaders you lead - it's a powerful statement. And keep your promises. Nothing breaks trust faster than a broken commitment, so be careful you don't say anything you don't intend to deliver on.

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Ensure they can follow. It's not uncommon for people to test a new senior executive, to challenge authority, sometimes in large, but often in small ways. Make it clear that you value good leaders and their points of view, and that they must accept their place within an ordered leadership team, with you at the helm as the final decision maker. A leader who cannot follow is a big liability to the entire team. When you don't meet challenges to authority firmly it is seen as weakness, and no one follows weak leaders.

Finally, be willing to change the roster. When you've done all you can to be the kind of leader other good capable leaders should follow, and someone demonstrates they are not fully committed to you, make a change. Find someone else you have full confidence in. The demands of senior leadership are far too stringent to approach with anything less than a dedicated fully committed leadership team.

Discussion questions:

1. How well do the members of your leadership team meet the test of dedication?
2. Have you brought a clear and compelling vision to the organization, and do you fortify it often?
3. How much time are you spending as a mentor, and could you change your habits somewhat to improve here?
4. How well do you keep commitments?

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