

Leadership instalments

Ebenezer and Leadership

By Dan Gaynor

IN MY APPROACH TO LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT I like to draw on a wide variety of sources – to come at leadership from different angles. I include among my favourites the following passage from Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol, "Oh!, but he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! a squeezing wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire; secret and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster."

So with Christmas approaching let's take this opportunity to pull some seasonal leadership lessons from one of literature's most well known bosses – Ebenezer Scrooge. Read the passage again and this time let your mind linger over the words. Now let's take a closer look.

We can't help but sympathize with the diligent and hard working clerk Bob Cratchett as he labours at his sparse and cold desk enduring the scorn and mistreatment of a cold and uncaring boss. Scrooge sees Bob's wish to be with his family over Christmas as an imposition. He takes the issue of work/life balance to ridiculous proportion. But let's not fool ourselves, there are a great many people today feeling torn between overly demanding bosses and family time and they are often as discouraged and Bob Cratchett. Encouraging balance as I've written before builds productivity. So this Christmas take time to do a balance audit. Look a little more closely at how hard the members of your team are working and how they are feeling about it. Make sure there is time for family and rest.

Dickens describes Scrooge as "secret and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster." I think we can pull two good lessons from this passage. Today a great many workplace leaders hoard too much information.

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They don't talk to their employees regularly about the business. If we want involved employees then we have to involve them – that's the way it works. When leaders share information openly and without threatening, when they genuinely work to help the members of their teams understand performance, opportunities and problems, they send a powerful message of trust and involvement. This is why a good communication plan is another productivity multiplier. So this season, take stock of how often you're holding staff meetings. If you're not meeting at least four times a year for 30 – 40 minutes, make it a priority.

Finally, I ask the question: Can a leader be "solitary as an oyster" and build a high performance team? You of course know the answer. Leadership is at its heart all about relationships. When we care about and take an interest in the people we lead they care about and take an interest in us – they don't want to disappoint leaders who care about



them. I am convinced this is a powerful leadership truth. Whether you are encouraging or correcting, you must care about the members of your team and they must know you do. So your final assignment as Christmas approaches is to ask yourself how well you know the people you are leading and how well they know you. If you know them

well and they know you, then you are doing the work of a good leader, keep it up. If you've lost touch, if you're spending too much time in your office and not enough on the shop floor resolve to get out more – Christmas is a great time to make a start.

We all know how the story ended. Ebenezer, after a visit from three apparitions, had a change of heart. He became one of literature's best bosses, illustrating the last and most important lesson: a change in the right direction can have a dramatic effect on everyone involved.

For more on the fundamentals of building strong productive teams call for a workshop.

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