Gaynor Consulting Inc.

leadership instalments

From Supervisor to CEO

By Dan Gaynor

THERE IS A LEADERSHIP MYTH THAT AS WE ASCEND THE CORPORATE hierarchy from front line supervisor to CEO the work of leadership is somehow completely different. I would argue that the opposite is true. The skills you draw on as a front line supervisor are also the most important skills for a CEO. Building relationships, feedback, communication, workplace coaching, hiring and performance management remain vital team building skills. Great CEOs appreciate there importance and continue polishing them.

This said there are probably three significant differences that I'd like to comment on:

You take on the responsibility for the performance of other leaders.
We know the immediate supervisor in any organization has the most direct impact on how long people stay and how well they perform. People do one of two things when they work for a poor leader - they quit or they stay and quit. With this in mind, senior leaders have a dual responsibility: their performance, and that of every other leader in the organization. If you are a leader who leads other leaders, their performance is your responsibility. You should know how they are doing and be working on their development. The job as a senior leader is to build the leadership capacity of the entire organization. Developing other leaders, and deciding who goes and who stays are key responsibilities for every senior executive. One poor leader in the ranks will depress the performance of his or her part of the organization.

You spend more time on culture.
While most leaders are victims of culture, the best are architects. Great leaders understand the power of culture. They are deliberate about creating a positive culture around values like team work, truth, diligence, quality, achievement and others. Culture is not what your team does but the way they go about it - a shared set of values and practices. It is what makes two companies in the same business very different places to work. It is one of the most important factors in the effort to attract motivate and retain talent, and it will become more important in the years ahead as the competition for people intensifies. The best senior executives discover the need to delegate more of the day-to-day activities to focus more on the organization's culture. They know that when they get this right, performance follows.

"The skills you draw on as a front line supervisor are also the most important skills for a CEO. Building relationships, feedback, communication, workplace coaching, hiring and performance management remain vital team building skills."

The mistakes cost more.
Following a mistake I made during the integration of a company our corporation had purchased my boss offered this observation, "Dan, you've learned something important. The mistakes a president makes cost more." He was right. This basic skills you hone as an entry-level leader are for the most part the same as those you use to build strong teams as a senior executive, but the mistakes cost more. Ideally, as you progress to senior leadership, your skills become more refined. Never let your pride get in the way of your own leadership development. This is the biggest shortfall I see in most of the senior leaders I encounter. They lose the humility to learn.

If you're reading this as a senior executive I hope you are encouraged to engage or maybe re-engage in your own leadership development, your team is depending on it. If you're reading as an entry or mid-level leader the message is much the same. The work of leadership development should never stop. As the cost of the mistakes grows you'll be much better positioned to avoid them.

Discussion questions:
1. Do you have the humility to keep learning?
2. Where is your leadership development currently focused, what is your next step?
3. What steps could you take to develop the leaders who report to you?

For more on developing strong leadership skills call about a 1/2 day workshop or check out our series of e-books.

For other Leadership Instalments articles go to:
www.gaynorconsulting.com

Dan Gaynor can be contacted at:
403.880.1780