

Courageous Leadership

Three Traits to Expand Your Influence

By Matt Forck

Knowing that you do your absolute best, push limits as far as possible and courageously show up the next day to do it again exemplifies leadership.

When you hear the word leader, what historic figures come to mind? Perhaps you think of George Washington and his courageous leadership that ultimately gave birth to a new nation. Or maybe you think of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., relating to his dream of equality for all. Others think of Abraham Lincoln, Nelson Mandela and Mother Teresa.

What do each of these leaders have in common? Heroic action for a cause. The problem with using them as examples is that we often do not have the same type of revolutionary impact. Instead, we fight bureaucracy, internal politics, habits and culture only to eek out small wins or minor adjustments. The work of SH&E professionals can be tough, frustrating, thankless and seemingly unrewarding.

Given this, maybe the best quote for leadership comes from Mary Anne Radmacher: "Courage doesn't always roar. Sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day saying, 'I will try again tomorrow.'"

George Washington, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and other well-known individuals exemplify leadership, but so does knowing that you do your absolute best, push limits as far as possible and courageously show up the next day to do it again. Following are three ways to be a courageous leader, one who quietly, yet effectively, moves the middle, gets results and experiences setbacks, only to try again tomorrow.

Show You Care

Randy was a tough, hard-to-get-to-know worker with more than 25 years' experience in the utility industry. He didn't get along too well with local management. I knew Randy from my time working with him as an apprentice. I was now the safety supervisor for his area, and I was responsible for nearly 400 utility line workers, substation workers and gas employees in out-state Missouri. I wanted to form a relationship with each person, showing each that I cared. However, given the miles between worksites, I couldn't see everyone in the course of a month.

So, I asked human resources for a list of everyone's birthday. Then, on each person's special day, I wrote a personal note. For Randy, I said, "Happy Birthday! I really liked working with you back in the day. I always liked your funny stories. Work safe, Matt." I sent it and forgot about it. About 5 years later, I was in Randy's show up location. On his locker I saw photos of his wife and



Matt Forck, CSP, JLW, directs K-Crof Industries LLC, in Columbia, MO. Through his keynote presentations, seminars, books and articles, Matt advocates for worker safety, encouraging safe choices and cultural change. He is a member of ASSE's St. Louis Chapter. Learn more at www.thesafetysoul.org.



©ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/ALEXANDER

kids, as well as a piece of faded paper. I recognized it immediately. It was my note to him.

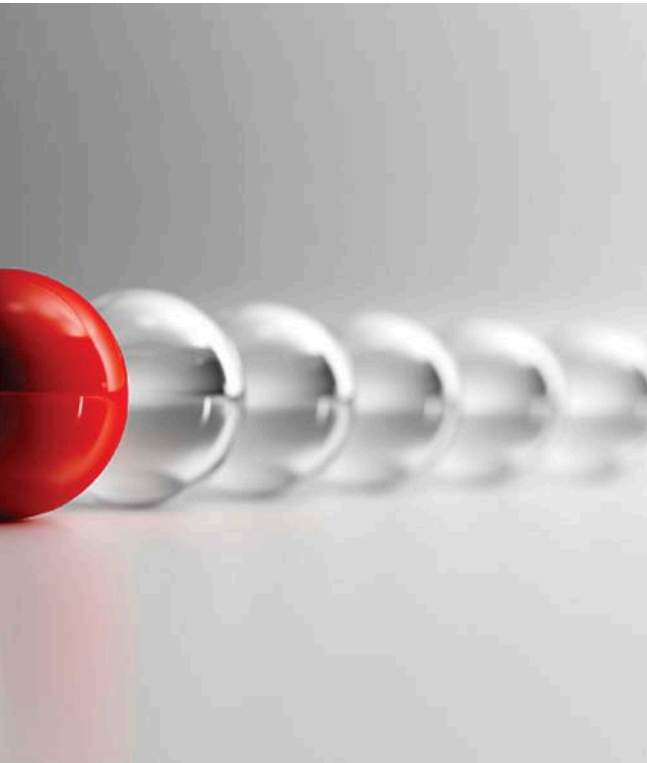
Family counselor and author Josh McDowell says, "Rules without relationship cause rebellion." Had I needed to talk safety or enforce a rule with Randy, I'm confident he would have listened because he knew that I cared. It may not seem like moving mountains, "charging the hill" or a decisive win, but showing someone that you care is true leadership. Earning trust, one person at a time, pays off.

Keep Your Cool

The Cold War era was tense. Perhaps no period was more intense than when Cuba declared itself a Soviet satellite state. For much-feared communism to be only 90 miles from U.S. shores was a national nightmare.

The Cold War began as World War II ended. For years, tensions between the two world superpowers grew, shifting to Europe and other countries such as Cuba. To halt the movement in Cuba and protect against a potential missile attack, a small force of CIA-trained Cuban exiles landed at the Bay of Pigs, Cuba, in April 1961. The effort to overthrow Fidel Castro failed and merely increased tensions between the U.S. and the Soviet Union.

Then, in 1962. U.S. ships detected a Soviet submarine near Cuba. The ships launched depth



charges in an attempt to bring the sub to the surface. To elude further detection, the submarine crew turned off most equipment, including fans and motors. As temperatures soared inside the vessel, so did tempers.

Eventually, the sub's commander ordered a torpedo launch. Procedure required two additional officers to agree. One immediately signed-off but the second refused. Instead, he reminded the other two that naval procedures only allowed firing on another ship if a submarine's hull had been breached, which it had not. "He was a man who never lost his cool," a friend later said. The situation was tense. Most on board pressured him to sign so the attack could be launched.

Safety can be tense. It doesn't matter whether you are in front of a group of union workers explaining a rule change or talking through injury statistics with the board of directors, the interactions can be intense. In such times, a leader keeps his/her cool. Many historians believe a missile launch on that fateful day would have started a nuclear war. The Soviet officer didn't know he was potentially saving the world by doing what he considered the "right" thing. Often, in the moment, we don't realize we are potentially saving the day by keeping our cool in tough situations.

Be the Unfiltered Truth to the Top

After graduating from college, I coached a 13- and 14-year-old AAU basketball team for 2 years. I'd like to say the team was undefeated or that it won a title. In truth, however, the team was not that great. My players learned the fundamentals of the game and a couple went on to be outstanding high school players.

But the highlight of those 2 years didn't come from my players. Instead, it was in the form of an invitation. Coach Bill, a local high school coach, invited me and a half dozen others to attend a University of Missouri basketball practice.

Growing up 30 minutes south of the Hearnes Arena, I was a huge Missouri Tiger fan and an even bigger Norm Stewart fan. Stewart was Mizzou's legendary coach. In 32 seasons, he led the Tigers to nine Big Eight Conference regular-season championships, six Big Eight Conference post-season tournaments and 16 NCAA tournament appearances, including two Elite Eight appearances. His career record of 634-333 ranks 11th among Division I head coaches. Being able to attend one of his closed practices was heaven for me.

Coach Stewart and his staff ran the players through numerous drills covering dribbling, defense, rebounding, conditioning and shooting. The coaches worked the players hard and the practice was intense. I noticed that Coach Bill was writing in a notebook. I figured he was jotting down some key drills to use with his team. Once I whispered a comment, a suggestion. Coach Bill jotted it down. I quietly wondered what he was doing.

As practice wound down and players were attempting their final free throws before hitting the showers, Coach Bill tore out his page of notes. He folded it and walked courtside. He shook Coach Stewart's hand, said something and gave him the folded sheet.

As we walked out, I asked Coach Bill about the exchange. "I thanked the coach for letting us attend, and I gave him a critique sheet," Bill said. "He really seemed to appreciate the notes."

President Harry Truman was nicknamed "Give 'em hell Harry," but he used to say, "I didn't give them hell, I just told the truth and they thought it was hell." One key role a leader plays is being an unfiltered truth to the top. First, SH&E professionals are close enough to where the work gets done to know what is happening on the shop floor. Next, SH&E professionals can work organizational networks and be heard, unfiltered, at the top.

Unfiltered feedback, such as Coach Bill gave to Coach Stewart, is an example of leadership. In organizations, such information often points to progress being slower than expected or culture not taking root as directed. Yet, if the top corporate executives don't know the unfiltered truth, they cannot make critical decisions to correct potentially important issues.

Leadership is a tough, hard and often unrewarding task. We live for those rare occasions when leadership means charging through barriers and tumbling mountains. Between those times, leadership is caring, keeping your cool and relaying information, unfiltered, consistently to the top. It is the quiet voice at the end of the day saying, "I will try again tomorrow."

Showing someone that you care is true leadership. Earning trust, one person at a time, pays off.