



ROUND ROCK TEXAS
LEADERSHIP
DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM
Cohort 1 Newsletter

DON'T MAKE IT COMPLICATED, STICK TO YOUR STRENGTHS

by Jason Remmert

Since joining the Leadership Development team, I have learned many things. The most notable of these is leadership can be difficult. Difficult in the sense that every person seems to know leadership when they see it, but everyone has their own separate definition. This makes “leadership qualities” more or less a moving target for us managers and supervisors who oversee staff due to everyone having a different idea of leadership. With this difficulty in mind, it is imperative we identify our strengths as leaders and stick to them as we lead our teams.

Strengths Finder 2.0 states, “when you know your top five strengths, you transform your life and work outcomes because you are playing to your strengths.” That really resonated with me as I have gone through this program. Rather than focus on where I am weak, why not identify where my strongest areas of leadership are, focus on these areas, and in theory, that will bring up all other areas of leadership. Leadership strengths like communication, information sharing and integrity have come to the forefront for me as a supervisor and I believe both myself, my team and the department have benefitted from this adjustment.

It has been a process adjusting my mindset from one focused on weaknesses to strengths since the beginning of this program; however, I’m grateful for the adjustment and have seen tremendous benefits to remaining strength based. My advice to those who take this course after us is to be aware of your weaknesses but put them in the back of your mind. Identify your strengths, work on improving them, leaning on them and I guarantee you will be a better leader for it. “If you have the right strategy that plays to your strengths, there are no limits to what you can lead, build and become” (Strengths Finder 2.0).

LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE SERIES

by Paul M. Hernandez

Being a part of the Leadership Development Program (LDP), I have come to enjoy the Leadership Roundtable Series. The roundtable sessions consist of the LDP team and representatives from City leadership to speak on and discuss leadership lessons they have learned over their careers and how it has helped them elevate to the position they are in now. There were three roundtable sessions during the program, in which the team met with Assistant City Manager Bryan Williams, Police Chief Allen Banks, former Fire Chief Robert Isbell, Human Resources Director Valerie Francois, Parks and Recreation Director Rick Atkins, Chief Financial Officer Susan Morgan, and General Services Director Chad McDowell.

The roundtable interaction created an inner spark to continuously strive to become a better leader in my department. Every speaker had different leadership qualities and brought a wealth of knowledge with them through their experiences in and outside of their career. Every series was amazing. Hearing how each representative started from the bottom and worked their way up to where they are now is inspiring. The vast knowledge and years of experience they freely give to you with any simple question is taken to heart. Though these representatives were all people of high positions, each one of them showed a great amount of humility and wanted to pass along as much leadership knowledge as they could in a short period of time. There is no doubt they have earned the position they have come to be promoted into and I am glad they sacrificed a part of their day to help the LDP become better leaders.

To be a part of such a program that allows the leaders of tomorrow to gain valuable insights and ask for advice from the leaders of today is how this city will continue to be successful and create new and successful leaders. I encourage everyone who hasn’t had a chance to speak to these individuals to have a conversation with them. They are great people and exceptional leaders. The greatest thing about the LDP and roundtable sessions is I will be able to take all I have learned, all the experiences I have had and be able to apply them to my department.

LEAD

By Laton Carr

Lead. It really doesn't matter where you are in your organization, career, or physically. You can do it; you should do it. Leadership is not beyond any of us.

When we think of leadership our thoughts most intuitively go to the heads of groups, heads of offices, heads of departments, heads of organizations, etc. There is no doubt leadership is essential in these positions and places, but leadership starts much more locally than that. Even if you don't lead others, you do lead yourself, and that is your first opportunity to make a difference.

Accountability is the most local leadership opportunity we have. True accountability starts within you. Your boss, for example, can hold you accountable for something, but like motivation, accountability will only begin when you want it to begin. Accountability must start from the very core of oneself, from one's very soul. The best your boss can really do is hold you responsible (response-able) so you are empowered to be able to deliver, and so there is someone to credit or blame around a deadline. However, if you hold yourself accountable for that assigned responsibility, then you have executed your first act of leadership.

With the responsibility given to you by your boss, you can set your own level of accountability. If you choose to do the bare minimum to fulfill your responsibility, you will have led up to expectations and no farther. If you choose, however, to hold yourself accountable for more in the assigned task(s), your boss may be satisfied that you have met your responsibility. He or she may even be impressed with your exceedance of the actual level of responsibility he or she assigned. However, you and only you will have known the level of accountability you attached to a higher standard than the responsibility that was assigned to you. You and only you will know whether you have met your own expectations.

A great example of someone leading through personal accountability and from within the ranks was when I was at a Whataburger a year or so ago in the outside drive-through lane. Instead of a window, where inside lane customers pay for and receive their orders, in the outside lane an employee has an iPad with which they take payment for orders. They then ferry orders from inside to the first couple of customers in line, then move on to collect money for unpaid orders again.

While I was waiting one day in the outside line, I watched the young employee go through the procedure of bringing orders to customers and moving on to collect money for orders before returning to the kitchen again. What caught my eye was the way she moved between points in her procedure, a quick step to the next car for payment, then another, then she would jog back into the kitchen.

She would then jog back out of the building and to the line with a few orders in her hands, take care of the handoff with the customers, then briskly take payment for a couple more orders before jogging back to the kitchen. When she took my payment, it was a very personable and genuine transaction, but I could not get over the way she then jogged away from my car and back to the building. What inspired the jog on top of the courteous customer interactions?

I have to confess my frequent flier status to Whataburger drive-through lanes is high, and based on years of observation from the local restaurant's outside lane, I can assure you there is nothing requiring these employees to move like this. I have observed no one to have done it before this young lady, or after. Furthermore, I had seen her do the same thing on a half a dozen visits after that, so it was not a fluke the first time I watched her jog from point to point. She and only she was in charge of whether she was going to jog or walk.

The accountability the young lady held herself to when no one around her was doing the same, and when no supervisor that I could ever tell was watching was assigned by her. She was surely one of the lowest positions in the organizational chart, and yet she was leading from right there where she was. During those visits she was leading herself. I am confident that she will one day lead others.

So, wherever you are, lead. Even if you are just leading yourself, it has an impact and it will be noticed at some point by peers and superiors. If you continue to lead from where you are, people will go from giving you no credit, to giving you some credit, to one day giving you more credit than you are due. In any case, everyone will benefit from your decision to lead.

"A strong leader accepts blame and gives the credit. A weak leader gives blame and accepts the credit."
— John Wooden, *Wooden on Leadership: How to Create a Winning Organization*

HOW TO HAVE HARD CONVERSATIONS

By Kit Perkins

As leaders, we must have hard conversations with those we manage from time to time. While hard conversations are never fun, not addressing important issues over time ends up being far worse. Don't worry though if you struggle with this, you are not alone. This step-by-step guide will show you the exact path for having effective hard conversations.

When you begin a hard conversation, make sure you start by identifying the issue (**Step 1**). Nothing can be discussed or addressed until it is out in the open.

After identifying the current issue, determine the root cause that might be leading to the issue (**Step 2**). This step involves active listening on your part and a bit of detective work. Try letting the person vent if necessary while gaining a deeper understanding of what is really bothering them.

The third step is to bring the conversation back to the present (**Step 3**). By inquiring as to how the issues identified in Step 2 are affecting them currently, you can help the person realize that many of their past issues may no longer be causing them hardship. Additionally, it helps you to understand if there are any issues they are still facing that could be affecting them.

The fourth step is to take the conversation from the present into the future (**Step 4**). How does the person envision themselves six months from now? Are these same problems still affecting them? If so, how does that make them feel?

The fifth step is to have the person identify any personal contributions to the issues they are facing (**Step 5**). By getting someone to admit they helped contribute to a problem, it removes the victim mentality and gives them back a measure of control. To start this step, ask probing questions like, "Is there anything you could have done that could have contributed to this situation?"

During step five, be sure not to jump in and provide your own list of ways this person has contributed to their problems. This will not help the person increase their self-awareness or help them take control of their issues.

The sixth step is to visualize the ideal outcome (**Step 6**). During the step, you want the person to envision their future without this issue. What good things will come or how much more effective will they be once their issues are resolved? In the seventh step, the person figures out what steps they need to take to make the future vision a reality (**Step 7**). Similar to step five, this is not where you tell them what actions must be taken. Telling someone what to do will only create a greater dependency on you.

These conversations are not easy but the consequences of not having these conversations are worse. The more comfortable you get moving through these seven steps with someone, the easier these conversations will get. Letting issues go unaddressed is not out of your control but something you are personally contributing to. You are not a victim. So create your own action plan, take control of your leadership style and have these hard conversations.

FIERCE LEADERSHIP

by James Combs

Have you heard of Fierce Leadership? In the Leadership Development Program (LDP), you most definitely will. One of the books on leadership we were tasked with reading during this course was *Fierce Leadership: A Bold Alternative to the Worst "Best" Practices of Business Today* by Susan Scott. This book is about some of the most common and recommended business practices that have been ingrained into corporate culture; identifying how those "best" practices may be holding you back from becoming a better leader; and providing other practices meant to replace those and help you improve your performance and become more satisfied with what you do and your work results. The cohort read the book, held a book debrief, created and gave a team presentation, and individually, we each wrote a paper on three of the "fierce" practices identified in the book.

When you look at the "best" practices identified in the book, there is a high probability they will be familiar to you. You will likely be able to associate personal experiences with what have been identified as some of the "worst" ways these "best" practices are used. This book is geared to teach you alternative means, methods, and understanding of how one should go about using these practices. For example, Fierce Leadership Practice #3 is titled "From Holding People Accountable to Modeling Accountability and Holding People Able". When people hear the phrase, "Who's accountable?", it often suggests feelings of blame, being wrong, being responsible, and maybe even the thought of being fired – all negative feelings. We don't often see individuals raising their hand and speaking up to take ownership when this question is asked. All too often, people resort to shirking away and becoming a victim as to why they could not meet the expectations assigned, provided a poor work product, or made a bad decision. *Continued on page 4*

SIX STRATEGIES TO EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

By Ryan Bornn

In today's modern business world, leaders need to be able to quickly adapt to the ever-changing world. Leaders that fail to change and develop their people will be left behind. As a leader your responsibility is to create a culture where people are encouraged to gain new skills and abilities.

Even those who seem to have natural leadership qualities cannot afford to get complacent. A leadership role is a lifelong journey in improving yourself as a leader even if you are born with a knack for it. Since being a leader is a set of mental rather than physical traits, you have constant room for improvement. The only thing stopping you is yourself.

The following six strategies will ensure you continue to be on top of your game.

Compete with Yourself

As a lifelong learner you must remain motivated and hungry to learn new things. Swimming in uncomfortable waters helps you evolve and grow as a person. Don't fall into the trap of being blind to your weaknesses as a leader. Embrace and learn from those flaws. Stay competitive with yourself!

Make Failure Your Classroom

Failure will test your competitive drive because it exposes your weaknesses. You have two choices when you have failed - learn and move on or choose to ignore and stay stagnate. Many people choose the easier path of pointing blame elsewhere for their failures. As a leader, use failure to better yourself.

Read, Read, Read

Leaders tend to read intensely when they start their careers, and that habit tends to trail off as the years go by. Don't let this occur! Always keep reading and learning to keep your skills sharp.

Create a Stretch Assignment

Find the time to stretch your skills by spending time with someone who has the knowledge or skill you want to learn. People are always willing to show you their skills, you only have to ask!

Remain Humble

As a leader you must remember where you came from. Don't become arrogant or become uncomfortable at the thought that you still can improve. Remain humble and keep the door of improvement open.

Collect Quality Feedback

Ask people what they think you can improve on. Open-ended feedback questions are a good way to give people a chance to elaborate on what you can improve on. When you receive the feedback, it can be right or wrong but those are the perceptions people have and they are correct for them. You will need to ask yourself, right or wrong, why you are being perceived the way you are.

Leaders who are lifelong learners are always on the lookout for ways to improve their leadership skills. With these six strategies, you are on your way to becoming a more effective leader for your people!

Coming Soon To A Breakroom Near You

LEADERSHIP LIBRARIES

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FIERCE LEADERSHIP

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The practice of modeling accountability and holding people able includes the following steps: 1. Prepare yourself to be accountable; 2. Prepare others to be accountable; 3. Do it; 4. Debrief; 5. Do it again, only better. When we hold ourselves accountable and demonstrate that to others, we are setting the example for the others to follow. We remove ourselves from the victim context and become more willing to take necessary risks that lead to our growth as professionals and as human beings. The aforementioned information is just a very high-level overview of Fierce Leadership Practice #3. With five additional Fierce Leadership Practices to learn about, there is plenty to add to your leadership toolbox.

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