

Building People Builds Morale

By Bette Price, CMC

True leaders recognize their responsibility to set the tone from the top that that people count. They expect their people-building philosophies to be adhered to at every level throughout the organization and they make sure that systems and processes are put in place that help to foster continual growth and well being. They recognize contributions both formally and informally and, most importantly, the leaders themselves model an environment of growth through actions that demonstrate caring, support, and trust. Here are ten easy-to-implement examples of what others have done to set the tone:

1. **Care enough to connect.** Taking time to talk with people is part of the process, but it is listening that conveys true caring. “The first thing we need to do is understand the environment, not by talking, but by listening, by learning, and then you lead,” says Lou Smith, president and CEO of the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation. If you reverse the process it’s almost always fatal for the individual or the organization, or both, Smith says. Five times a year Smith implements this broad-based listening concept by having Chats With Lou. This listening format gives every associate a chance to talk with him, which provides a chance for Smith to listen for important information from which to learn—then lead.
2. **Offer self-discovery and coaching programs.** “The best idea anyone every had is one they came up with themselves,” says David Novak, Chairman and CEO of Tricon Global Restaurants. He says great organizations really work on proving self-discovery and coaching programs. Novak has changed all

supervisory titles to Coach and coaching and recognition have become an integral part of their role.

3. **Do what's right and tell the truth.** “What I had to learn early on is what people expect more than anything else out of the leader is honesty,” says Ann Hambly, Managing Director of Prudential Asset Resources. “Treat them as adults and communicate. Sometimes the message is not a fun message, but you have to delivery it. The worst thing you can do to people in the interest of trying to keep them happy, is to not tell them the truth.”
4. **Get rid of blame.** David Walker, the Comptroller General of the Untied States, says, “You’ve got to make mistakes—no risk, no return, no innovation. The key is to learn from them and try not to repeat them—try not to make dumb mistakes.” Get rid of the blame, increase accountability, and non-accusingly share the learning from the mistakes so everyone can benefit for the future.
5. **Create opportunities.** Leaders help people achieve their own personal success. Bill Matthews, Managing Director of the accounting firm Plante & Moran, believes every manager should always be looking for his/her replacement. “That requires taking a sincere interest in people, giving them the freedom to make choices, to encourage and guide them, and just have a caring attitude toward their careers without worrying that they are going to take over my job or show me up.” Worry less about yourself and help others to become more of they have the talent to become.
6. **Encourage employees to give of themselves and support their efforts.** Mike McCarthy, Chairman of McCarthy Building Companies, encourages everyone to get involved in charitable activities. “They get a larger view of who they are,” McCarthy

- says. “To the extent that you are giving to other people, you feel better about yourself.” McCarthy established a rather unusual program at his company to demonstrate leadership’s belief of giving to others. He established the McCarthy Emergency Family Relief Fund which provides instant money for either employees or someone the employee knows who has encountered a family emergency.
7. **Get rid of politics.** “Getting rid of the internal politics, the jockeying for position, the trying to score points against your peers so that you can appear to be better. All of that you just have to get rid of very, very quickly,” says Linda Huett, President and CEO of Weight Watchers International, Inc. Huett says that when you see politics and you recognize it, you have to talk opening to the people being political and let them know that it is unproductive. Approaching politics head on communicates a clear message that leadership does not favor a political approach and that teamwork is rewarded.
 8. **Strive to promote balance.** “It’s always been my feeling that if you don’t have balance, then it affects everything—your personal life and your business life,” says Gary McDaniel, CEO of Chateau Communities. McDaniel says it is important to realize that sometimes getting the job done means taking 60 hours while another time it may take less. The main thing is making sure the job gets done. “If at three o’clock in the afternoon you think you need to leave and go do something personal, I trust in your judgment and know that you’re working hard and you’re not going to leave something hanging that has to get done.” There ought to be times when people leave early to attend things like their child’s baseball game, McDaniel says.
 9. **Share WOW stories.** At MascoTech near Detroit, Michigan, they make a conscious effort to catch people doing something incredibly right. Then they publish it as a

weekly *Wow Story* in the internal newsletter. “People like to be acknowledged for what they do right,” says CEO Frank Hennessey. “They need to know that you know the contributions that they are making.”

10. **Model expectations by leadership.** At The Container Store, Chairman Garrett Boone says it is not good enough to talk about the company’s principles and expected performances—leadership has to model them and to show them in action. “When I visit a store, there are certain times I work on the floor,” Boone says. “The time that I’m on the sales floor, I want to make sure that I’m doing exactly what we are preaching. It shows everybody that I think it is an important thing to do, that it’s worth my time doing, and that I hold myself to the same standards.” Make sure that your words and actions are one in the same.”

It doesn’t matter what your industry is, rather it’s private, public, government, nonprofit, or educational. The point is, as a leader, you become more significant to your role when you care enough to recognize and build others at all levels within your organization. If those at the CEO level can do it, so can you.

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