

ATN Business Sense
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With the swearing in of Prime Minister Gillard Australia been reminded of how a poor leader can be swiftly replaced. Commercial leadership is the same and businesses should always appoint the best leaders and have in place a process for training and developing future leaders. Unfortunately many transport operators have no such process and leaders and other people are recruited by “association”. That is, someone knows someone they think might be able to do the job and they are recruited without even writing a job specification or determining how suitable they are for the position. If they are lucky the person works out but often they don’t. They either move on quickly and recruitment has to start again or they tolerate an under-performer. Both the business and the employee are disadvantaged.

Tony Schwartz, writing on the June 2010 Harvard Business Review describes “How Sony Pictures Gets More Out of People by Demanding Less.” He explains the need for leaders to set the right context for employees to replenish their energy, provide examples and create a safe environment.

Schwartz says to get away from your desk and preferably out of the office altogether for lunch “so that you come back focussed and fuelled to face the rest of the day. It will encourage your employees to do the same.”

Feeling valued is our core emotional need and Schwartz says “Write a note of appreciation to someone who works for you once a week. Be very specific about what it is that you value.”

Cultivating creativity should be encouraged by setting aside “an informal, relaxing space at work that is devoted to creative thinking and brainstorming. Schedule a regular time – at least once every two weeks – when colleagues gather to brainstorm new ideas, discuss longer term projects or set strategy.”

Share your passion should be done by communicating “what you stand for and what your larger mission is, beyond profit. If that isn’t clear to you, set aside some time to reflect upon it. What is it that gets you up in the morning? What’s the value you’re trying to add in the world? Why should others feel passionate about doing it too?”

Don’t avoid conflict. Schwartz says “ignoring a difficult situation typically does more harm than communicating directly and honestly about it. The key to a successful conversation is not to assume you’re right but to enter into it in a spirit of openness and curiosity.” Not taking action is like doing nothing after finding out you have cancer; the situation only gets progressively worse.

Don’t try to do multiple things at the same time. Schwartz says to “make an effort to give people your full focus and try to listen without interrupting. You know you have succeeded if you’re



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capable of repeating back what you just heard.” That is hard but it is a great demonstration of good leadership to be able to repeat back to an employee what they have just said. It shows the leader has listened even if they decide to take no further action.

Don't be self absorbed. “It's easy to make it all about you. Try to step beyond your own immediate needs to better serve the needs of those you lead.” That means, for example, when an employee comes to you wanting time off for a special reason, family illness, family event or something else important to the employee, give them time off, tell your other people and get them on board to cover for the absent employee. Treating your people as you would like to be treated is good leadership.

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