



Bluepoint Leadership Development

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Leadership Above the 49th Parallel: Perspectives from Canada

Leadership in the Trenches

By David Sullivan, RBC Royal Bank

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In my mind, there are 9 key elements critical to success:

VALUES: Some organizations have published values. You should have your own set of values, and let people know what you stand for. My personal values are to treat people with dignity, courtesy, respect, and honesty. This does not mean telling everyone what they want to hear. It does mean being open, truthful, and forthright in everything you do.

INFORMATION: Many years ago when I was in college, one of my professors told me "Knowledge is power." It is - only if you share it with your team. I am not referring to *insider* information, but rather information concerning your team's business. What are the goals and challenges, and what is the measure of success? A great friend of mine subscribed to the approach of "tell them what you're going to tell them, tell them, and then tell them what you told them." If you want your team to engage, you need to empower them. Empower your team members by freely sharing information.

CLARITY AND SIMPLICITY: Over the past ten years "consultant-ese" has made its way into mainstream business. Words such as "value added, metrics, robust, granular, crystallize, dovetail, continuum, flesh out and percolate" are used liberally in verbal and written communication. Don't complicate life by adding "consultant-ese" - keep the message clear and simple.

FACTS: Leaders today are busy people. It is easy for some to fall into the trap of using anecdotal hearsay to support and make decisions while formulating preconceived notions about a situation or person. Maybe we should be guided by the mantra "You will only lead and manage - based on factual information presented in an accurate and timely manner." Using outdated facts, or ones that have not previously been shared, to judge a person's performance is simply not fair or ethical. The next time you attend a meeting where anecdotal information is being bantered around - tactfully ask, "Based on what?"

STRATEGY: For a team to follow and work towards the strategic goal, the strategy needs to be clear, short, and easy to understand. While today's business environment is constantly changing and adaptability is important, there is much to be said about clarity, simplicity and consistency. One of the more successful strategies a group I worked with developed went along the lines of "Serve Clients, Build Partner Relationships, Do Deals and Make Money." If you wanted to do something, be it a project or a change, if it couldn't be bucketed into one of these four areas, it just wasn't important.

HIRING: Always hire the best qualified people. Hire people who are not like you. Gender, race, creed, and colour have no place in the hiring decision. Having stated that, neither prejudice nor bigotry should ever enter into the process, or be tolerated.

Diversity of experience and thought will make for a great work environment. Diverse groups are creative, thoughtful, tolerant, understanding and successful. Unique individuals have a strong sense of pride and display entrepreneurial characteristics critical to succeed as a team.

Don't be a leader of a group of pre-programmed robots. Strive to be a great leader. Strive to be a leader "in the land of the misfit toys." Go out and hire some people who might not fit elsewhere in an organization, who may have been labeled as nonconformists. You will be surprised at their contribution when the individual is "let loose."

PERFORMANCE MEASURES: Why shoot for a goal that is less than perfection? Many people set lofty business performance goals of completing 95% of a function in a specified time period. What about the other 5%? What's wrong with 100%? By accepting anything less you are unwittingly promoting mediocrity. This same approach applies

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to team members. Some leaders on the line spend 80% of their time dealing with the bottom 20% of performers. Make it a personal goal to spend 100% of your time with 100% of the people who want to be with the team, and contribute to its success. Employing a cut-and-run approach to poor performers will pay huge dividends, set a high standard, while sending a strong message - there is no place for mediocre performance.

PASSION: How do you describe passion? Is it the feeling of joy when faced with a challenging project and anticipation of completion? Would it be the feeling you experience from pride of ownership? Have you created an environment where pride and ever changing learning opportunities are commonplace? There is no greater sense of personal satisfaction than leading and being part of a team of "deal junkies." The "deal" is whatever business you are in, be it production or service. To paraphrase Tom Peters - the work matters; what we do - matters!

SENSE OF HUMOR: If you have a passion for a particular area, show it with a touch of humor. It is contagious. Spending 40, 50, even 60 hours a week working with your team doing something that doesn't make you smile is a real tragedy. I am not suggesting circulating "joke of the day." It can come by sharing a humorous personal experience with some team members. Show them you care; show them you are human. They will appreciate it.

Leadership is not for everyone. However, it can be very rewarding. Surround yourself with a leadership team that is diverse, talented, and forthright. Ask for feedback. I have found brutal, but honest, feedback has allowed me to grow personally and professionally.

It continues to amaze me the outstanding talent that can be unleashed in the proper environment. I have been blessed to work with some brilliant leaders during my career. I am extremely fortunate to lead an outstanding group of very talented professionals. The leadership team is stellar, diversified, thoughtful, courageous, driven, fiercely loyal, and wildly successful.

To end off, a quote from Albert Einstein might best describe your journey to great leadership: "Great spirits have always encountered violent opposition from mediocre minds."

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The Loyalty Factor



By Bryn Meredith

In the December edition of "The Point" we talked about the growing demands being placed on Human Resource Professionals to devote more time and energy towards both **Talent Retention and Talent Acquisition**.

A number of people responded with some great feedback, and one common thread was the need to improve the "Loyalty Factor" within their organization as a key to helping both with retention and acquisition. Loyalty may be seen, at first, as only benefiting retention, but reputation travels fast and it travels far. A loyal culture reputation -

where people want to work, prosper, and further their career - also attracts talent.

A variety of articles and surveys have been published since December that examine loyalty and its ramifications. The data seems to confirm that a life long career with one company is a rare thing. Shifting among employers and careers is no longer viewed as abnormal or unethical. A survey by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) recently indicated ***"that at any given time, 75% of employees are looking for other opportunities, and under these conditions, retention has to be a key concern."***

A Loyalty Factor of 100% may be unattainable, and perhaps undesirable, but HR must do better than 25%.

Loyalty is a two-way affair. We cannot expect employees to be loyal to the company if the company does not demonstrate loyalty to them. Downsizing during the 70's and 80's caused individuals to develop a "fend for myself" attitude. When the booming, rampant talent market of the 90's rolled in, this mindset fueled by signing bonuses and stock options created a type of "I'm going to get back what you took from me with interest and penalties" type of behavior. Loyalty was for losers.

The tech bust, market downturn, and now market growth has moderated those mood swings. Working for a good, stable company is seen as desirable once again. The major tension many workers now feel is between the future opportunities that may open up as baby boomers leave vacancies versus the corporate trend towards outsourcing. These aren't the best conditions for the Loyalty Factor, but they are better than we have seen in a decade.

What can we do to stimulate this two-way loyalty exchange? There is no better place to start than to look at the recent **"Hewitt Associates"** annual survey that identifies the 50 Best Employers in Canada. These companies are judged by their employees to be great places to work, companies that create exceptional employee engagement and where employees feel a connection between their daily contribution and the success of their organization. The survey identifies how these companies do this two-way exchange best.

Leadership Direction:

- They were clear about where the organization is going and what it is going to take to get there.
- They display passion and enthusiasm about the future.
- They build trust with employees by making commitments and consistently delivering on them.
- They focus most of their time and energy on coaching employees to be successful.
- They create personal connections with employees.
- They listen to what the front line is saying and take corrective action quickly.

Career Development:

- They constantly talk about the importance of growth and development and ensure that resources are available to support career development programs.
- Their leaders are properly equipped and trained to proactively coach employees through career development discussions on an ongoing basis.
- They ensure that the human resources function has the expertise and resources to support managers and employees as they pursue their development plans.
- Their leaders are truly excited at the prospect of grooming their successors and helping employees reach their potential.

Recognition:

- They tailor recognition to the unique situation and the individual involved.

- They notice extra work.
- Their leaders deliver recognition sincerely and with an expression of true appreciation.
- Their leaders act as role models and demonstrate what recognition looks like, particularly toward new hires within the organization.

If you worked for a company that did all these things, wouldn't you feel the Loyalty Factor kick in?

Learning and development are the Loyalty Factor's traveling companions. Investing in employees' futures and career growth opportunities are key predictors of employee loyalty. Another predictor is brand pride. If you want to create an emotional connection with your employees, then they need to be proud of where they work, what they do, and the knowledge that they work for an ethical, socially responsible organization. A sense of ownership of the company's future goes a long way to creating loyalty.

The Loyalty Factor cannot be built overnight. Consistency, patience, and visible executive team support are required. Look closely at some of the practices of your own organization and ask yourself if there is anything your organization could be doing that would help to improve the Loyalty Factor. The results can be well worth it.

What are you doing to improve loyalty in your organization? We'd love to hear your stories. We will publish any helpful tips in a future edition of *The Point*.

Bryn Meredith is President of Bluepoint Canada. You may contact him by email at brynmeredith@bluepointleadership.com

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The Breaking Point



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A few years ago, at the height of the technology boom, I spoke with a talented young software engineer who had been fast tracked into a management position going, in a very short period of time, from being a self-fulfilled, highly competent and respected, **individual** producer to being a stressed out leader, no longer enjoying his job. He confided that he had felt obliged to accept the promotion but was reluctant. He soon found that he did not enjoy having to confront chronic under-performers, didn't know how to motivate them or hold them accountable, and was bewildered by the multiplicity of people-related issues that consumed large parts of his day. His training had equipped him to develop algorithms not people. Highly stressed, he was no longer "in the flow," doing what he loved best: writing software.

Knowing that the skills we have are adequate for the job is one of the requirements for being **in the flow**, that marvelous state of consciousness described by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Professor of Psychology and Management at the Drucker and Ito Graduate School of Management at Claremont Graduate University. In his book, [Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience](#), Csikszentmihalyi explains "flow," or being in the zone, as a state of consciousness where we are so absorbed by what we are doing that we don't even notice the passage of time - hours feel like minutes. I liken it to those times when we are so enthralled in a project or a task, so engaged, that we forget to eat. For flow to occur, we need to have a balance between our skills and the high challenges we are tasked with. When the challenge is high, yet the skill set for the challenge is low, we are in a state of anxiety. If this condition persists for prolonged periods of time, without

relief, we enter a cycle of stress which could lead to burn out.

Another form of stress that we are often reminded about is the stress caused by "technology overload" - excessive E-mail, cell phones, text messaging, Blackberries and now blogs - all of which end up creating a loss of focus and affecting productivity. Our modern day angst of not being able to get it all done leads us to a multitasking frenzy. The January 16 issue of [Time Magazine](#) article explores the issue of multitasking and concludes that frantic multitasking actually deludes us into thinking that we are getting a lot done, while in reality we end up getting less done, and the work quality suffers. This is particularly interesting: "When a New York Times reporter interviewed several recent winners of McArthur 'genius' grants, a striking number said they kept cell phones and iPods off or away when in transit so that they could use the downtime for thinking."

A catch-all phrase for multitasking, continuous technology interruptions and the information overload that we are bombarded with daily is "cognitive overload." (1) Leaders are particularly vulnerable to cognitive overload, as they are typically required to consider a lot more information than the rest of us. Interestingly, in an article by Dr. Howard Gardner, *The Synthesizing Leader*, which appeared in the just published [The HBR List: Breakthrough Ideas for 2006](#) (Harvard Business Review, February 1, 2006), we learn that the single most important trait of future leaders in the developed world is the ability to synthesize information, ". . . to decide what information to heed, what to ignore and how to organize and communicate that which we judge to be important." (2) Synthesizing which information to consider entails, among other things, developing standards for selection, such as source credibility and relevance. Asking questions such as "Does this information form a coherent story? Do these trends make sense?" In our data rich world, selecting which pieces of information are worthy of our ever-shrinking attention span is a key competency for reducing stress and ultimately, being more effective as a leader.

Besides learning to effectively synthesize information, what can we do to help ourselves and our constituents to minimize stress? Here are ten strategies to consider:

1. Making sure that your newly-minted leaders have the appropriate tools needed for their people management responsibilities is a key requirement to helping them succeed and minimizing the stress. This includes mentoring, providing a relevant leadership skills assessment to uncover strengths and areas for development, assisting in the creation of a learning action plan and providing leadership training/or and coaching. It also means providing ongoing support and feedback. Sadly, some of these initiatives are sometimes rushed in as an emergency measure after the rookie leader has caused some casualties. Often, these interventions, because they are brought in after the fact and in response to problems, are perceived by the new leader as a criticism and as remedial action which may be embarked upon reluctantly. Providing these tools and services before, or just at the start of the promotion, on the other hand, is seen as a perk and a sign of the company's investment in the individual's career development.
2. Creating conditions that allow all your constituents to be in "the flow" while they achieve results is another consideration for reducing workplace-induced malaise and helping them to perform successfully. In addition to ensuring that individuals have the skills adequate for the job, this also entails setting and communicating clear goals and expectations and providing immediate feedback on how well a person is performing - helping employees understand the effect of their efforts. This means not waiting until the annual review to have a discussion of the employee's performance and confronting them with a laundry list of "improvements." It is also worth mentioning that keeping individuals in positions where their skill set far exceeds the challenge is also stressful and ends up taking its toll. While every job has routine, non-

challenging aspects, leaders need to be aware of where their constituents are in terms of job challenge vs. skill set and making an effort, wherever possible, to design jobs that take full advantage of their constituents' talents and to continually raise the bar.(3)

3. Not everyone, of course, is subject to stress: Some individuals have very strong resilience and are not only better able to cope with stress but they also thrive on stress. These are people who do not overreact, they don't let external events derail them, they continue to keep their eye on the ball and maintain mental resilience, no matter what goes on around them. While everyone else is stuck on the problems, they focus on solutions and have a one track mind: moving forward. They don't waste time worrying about what they can't change and they don't focus on their loss of control. Typically these are people who choose to see the gift in the adversity and, if downsized for example, will consider how best to use their settlement funds to retrain or take some time off to build their deck and reconnect with their family, before rejoining the workforce, renewed and ready to press Restart. Instead of focusing on holding on to grudges, they focus on networking. Contrast this with the individual who is crushed by such a stressful event, who wastes the "severance period" being consumed by the "wrongs" committed, who burns bridges and possibly never recovers from the adversity. We admire the "resilient" group. What can we learn from these people to help us cope with the stress of adversity in the workplace? The answer is provided by Dr. Susan Kobasa and Dr. Salvatore Maddi who studied employees undergoing a major restructuring at Illinois Bell Telephone in the 1980s. Their findings are outlined in [The Hardy Executive: Health Under Stress](#), where we learn of the personality traits of stress-hardy people, namely, **commitment**, (being committed to something that is meaningful, i.e. work, community, family; staying engaged and involved in ongoing events, even in the most trying of circumstances, rather than feeling isolated); **control** (believing in our ability, through our efforts, to turn events to our advantage rather than adopting a passive and powerless victim mode) and **challenge** (viewing change, whether positive or negative, as an opportunity to learn rather than as a threat). We can all benefit from these pointers in times of stress.

4. A concept, borrowed from Jim Collins' [Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap...and Others Don't](#), that is useful in minimizing stress and achieving clarity of focus is creating a "Stop Doing List". Those who built companies that went from **good to great** "...displayed a remarkable discipline to unplug all sorts of extraneous junk." We all have "To Do Lists" but how many of us have created a list to isolate and halt pursuits that don't serve us well any longer? Can you benefit from creating a Stop Doing List? What are your energy drainers? Are these among some of the offenders that may cause you stress: internalizing others' criticism, fragmented boundaries, power struggles, unprotected personal time, useless networking, continuous one-way favors? What can you do to address these and other drainers so that you can stay in your power and reduce your stress? What can you eliminate to make room for what energizes you and brings you closer to achieving your goals?

5. Along those same lines, if business strategy is a cause of stress, consider reading this focused, well-researched and insightful book, [Profit From the Core: Growth Strategy in an Era of Turbulence](#) by Chris Zook and James Allen. The book reaffirms the timeless tenet that focusing on your core business - that which you do best - is the most efficient way to bring about long-term growth and profit. By refocusing on what you do best, the authors advise, it will also be easier to spot inefficiencies that drain your business. The book contains many actionable ideas and shows how to identify your company's core business and define your competitive advantage in order to be able to discover and evaluate opportunities for expanding into related businesses, what Zook calls "logical adjacencies." Among the multitude of practical, well reasoned ideas contained in this book is also a list of key management questions for evaluating adjacencies. The concept transcends business: if we don't narrow down our

activities to a fundamental core from which we can grow, a strategy becomes much harder to develop.

6. Pick your battles wisely. How often have we heard this? Yet, in the heat of the moment, do we stop for a second and think: Is this truly worth fighting for? Are you even likely to win? An example of such a no-win battle which can easily occur in the workplace is fighting **the power behind the throne**--that is, entering into a contest of wills with a person who has no apparent authority but who has great influence. This individual is very adept at working behind the scenes, and you can easily find yourself unwittingly on thin ice, wasting your valuable, non-renewable energy. Long ago I came across a statement which said: *Maturity is being content to know that you are right without having to prove someone else wrong.* How much stress could we eliminate if we were guided by such a philosophy - if we decided to devote each day only to that which is worthy of our attention - our personal achievements and our organization's achievements?

7. If lengthy non-productive meetings are among the stressors, consider learning and introducing to your team a tool such as Edward de Bono's **Six Thinking Hats(TM)**. It's a long-standing, proven and useful tool for parallel thinking that encourages cooperation, reduces conflicts and helps run more focused, efficient meetings. Briefly, the technique entails separating thinking into six important functions, each one of which is identified with a colored symbolic "thinking hat" that represents a different style of thinking. The six styles of thinking or perspectives are: white hat for facts, figures and data; black hat for judgments, cautions, downsides and risks; yellow hat for positive views and benefits; green hat for creativity, alternatives, solutions; red hat for gut feel, intuitions and emotions; blue hat for overview, process control, organizing and action items. Individuals can easily orchestrate an agenda for the meeting that lays out a sequence of hats or thinking. By mentally wearing and switching "hats," individuals can focus and redirect thoughts and the conversation, as appropriate.

8. Minimizing stress also means looking at our life through a holistic lens: addressing our needs in each area, whether it is physical, emotional, intellectual, psychological or social. What are some daily practices that you can introduce to create reserves in each of these important areas of your life? Reserves help us when we feel depleted from the day's stressors. If you need inspiration in this area, consider reading Dr. John C. Maxwell, **Today Matters: 12 Daily Practices to Guarantee Tomorrow's Success**. Maxwell provides 12 practical guidelines such as practicing and developing good thinking to gain an advantage, practicing commitment to gain tenacity, pursuing growth to give us potential and developing priorities to give us focus. On the latter, is reading and responding to pointless E-mails the first thing you do when you start the day? What about reversing the order? Focusing *first* on projects that will give you the highest returns for yourself and your organization? Imagine the benefits of establishing this simple initiative as a daily practice. The book is a reminder that "we choose our life by how we spend time" - people who achieve their potential act on their priorities every day.

9. Along the same lines, one of the most useful tools I came across for stress management is Stephen Covey's Time Management Matrix in his 1995 book entitled, **First Things First: To Live, to Love, to Learn, to Leave a Legacy**. This involves creating four quadrants: Urgent/Important; Not Urgent/Important; Urgent/Not Important; Not Urgent/Not Important and using the matrix to do a forensic analysis of how you spend your time and then taking remedial steps to focus more on what matters. Then ask yourself: "What is the one activity you know if you did superbly well and consistently, would have significant positive results in your personal life?" And then ask the same questions for your professional life.

10. Finally, it is worth mentioning that there is another form of less advertised stress: that of the unwelcome promotion. While everyone

can be trained to be a leader, the truth is, not everyone *enjoys* leading others. We can derive an inspiration from 3M, a company which provides their technical people with parallel dual career paths, known as the "[dual ladder](#)" system. This means that individuals can still progress in their careers in terms of compensation and other manifestations of advancement without having to enter the management ranks. For example, this approach honors those who excel without forcing them to stray from their natural R & D habitat. Some individuals targeted for a management promotion may be too reluctant to voice their apprehension for fear of making a less than favorable impression. Management needs to be open to this possibility and make it safe for their talented individuals to march to the beat of a different drum.

The software engineer who was catapulted into a leadership position went on to take on more people management responsibilities during the downsizing that took place in the post technology boom. He almost reached his breaking point and eventually moved on to another company where he joined the rank and file and is happily focusing on writing software again. He has come to terms with his personal definition of success: **Do What You Enjoy!** As Jack Nicklaus once said, "*It's difficult to excel at something you don't truly enjoy.*"

(1) Source: David Kirsch, Department of Cognitive Science at University of California: <http://www.org1st.com/research/15.htm>

(2) The article is a prelude to Dr. Gardner's book on the synthesizing mind: *The Five Minds of the Future* (Harvard Business Review Press, 2006).

(3) J. Kouzes and B. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002).

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