

Finding and Keeping Great Talent in Organizations Begins with Extraordinary Leadership

by Avery M. Henderson, Ph.D., M.P.H.
Motivational Speaker, Trainer and "Edu-tainer"



This article, by Avery Henderson Ph.D., M.P.H., was originally published in the June/July 2002 issue of the *MPI Carolina Blitz*. To request a copy of this article, or other articles authored or co-authored by Avery Henderson, please go to the "request information" page at <http://www.whoopedoo.com>.

Please scroll down to the next page to read the complete text of this article.

Finding and Keeping Great Talent in Organizations Begins with Extraordinary Leadership

by Avery M. Henderson, Ph.D., M.P.H.
Motivational Speaker, Trainer and “Edu-tainer”

In today’s job market individuals with great talent are looking for exceptional opportunities that go far beyond money and power. Organizations that have extraordinary leadership and organizational culture are attracting and retaining the best and the brightest talent. In my leadership and team building training programs we identify four major strategies leaders use to get power: money, politics, intimidation and respect. From these same programs, I find a major leadership dichotomy which I call Ordinary - Extraordinary Leadership. Most leaders and managers of many well-known organizations motivate followers more with money, politics and intimidation, than they do with respect. To be sure, these leaders usually get what they want in the short-term, but in the long-term they lose great talent. Extraordinary leaders, on the other hand, focus on getting their people to respond by touching, moving and inspiring them. Such leaders gain respect and loyalty...and that is their secret to keeping great talent.

By interviewing some of extraordinary community and business leaders, as well as some people they lead, I have recorded many character-based principles such leaders use in gaining respect and loyalty from the people they lead. One belief that sets extraordinary leaders apart from the ordinary is that personal character is more important than personality. (Personality is who you are when people are watching; character is who you are when no one is watching!) Below are my top nine choices of these character-based principles. Hopefully they will be of benefit to your personal and organizational leadership quest and when used will help in the attraction to and retention of employees with great talent for your organization.

Have A Passion for Life and A Purpose for Being that Involves Others. When you have a passion for life you normally have a number of good purposes for getting up and out each morning. You look forward to the opportunities and challenges that await you each day, whether it be resolving challenges from customers, creating a new product or service with the help of others, or improving employee morale and productivity. For many extraordinary leaders their passion for life is found in their work, others find it in community service or in raising the bar in recreational sports or other endeavors. All of these extraordinary leaders report that their lives are extremely full primarily because of their passion for life and interactions with people.

Genuinely Care for Other People and Be of Service to Them. The best way to show people we really care for them is by being of service to them, some how, some way. In effect you lead by example as you are being of service. This concept is called servant-leadership. Joseph K. Greenleaf was the first to write extensively about servant-leadership in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. More recent authors of leadership books, like Stephen Covey, James Autry, Peter Block, Max DePree, Peter Drucker, Lorraine Matusak, M. Scott Peck, Peter Senge, and Margaret Wheatley, embrace servant-leadership and suggest that it is a better way to lead our organizations in the 21st century. Many of the leaders interviewed use servant-leadership training as a foundation for customer service.

Balance Competition with Cooperation and Collaboration. Teamwork is paramount to the extraordinary leader's success. By involving followers in cooperative and collaborative efforts, such leaders are able to produce a synergy that overcomes all odds against accomplishing the goals at hand. Just as important, extraordinary leaders recognize when competition is appropriate and inappropriate. The rule of thumb is that competition belongs external, in the marketplace; cooperation and collaboration belong internal. Furthermore, whereas competition is good for raising the bar for product and service excellence, it is inappropriate for resolving conflicts. Ordinary leaders approach conflict with a WIN/LOSE paradigm; extraordinary leaders approach conflict with a WIN/WIN paradigm. In the latter case, relationships are more important than being right because positive relationships are the key to all great customer service (internal or external).

Take Responsibility for Your Communication and Decisions. Extraordinary leaders realize that the results you get define the meaningfulness of your communication. This means that they look for better ways to communicate when they fail to get the results they expect, rather than blaming others for failing to understand. Such leaders listen more than they talk. Extraordinary leaders also understand the importance of assertive communication that results in WIN/WIN outcomes. Being assertive means that one stands up for her/his rights while also standing up for the rights of other people. The challenge is to use creativity and collaboration to arrive at decisions and solutions that work for everyone in the conflict. Aggressive, passive and passive aggressive communication all produce outcomes in which someone loses. Who likes to lose? Such communication styles are last resorts in specific situations, a situational leadership necessity. At times the leader alone must make tough decisions. After soliciting input, extraordinary leaders make those decisions and accept the responsibility for the consequences, knowing that not everyone involved will be pleased.

Keep Integrity and Credibility in Tact. Extraordinary leaders build and maintain trust and lead by example. One's integrity is at the core of these activities. Integrity is about being whole and complete with others, doing what you say you are going to do. When one just absolutely cannot keep one's word, to restore integrity and credibility, one must clean up the mess he/she has caused. Taking risks to trust others is very important and through experiences one learns how trustworthy another person is. On the other hand, being trustworthy is personal. It's about telling the truth and keeping your word. The

quickest way to lose someone's trust is by not telling the truth or by failing to keep your word. Extraordinary leaders accept the fact that they are role models and their behaviors are being watched and imitated by followers. Congruent words and actions are critical to their integrity and credibility.

Develop Visions and Take Action and Necessary Risks. Visioning, creating possibilities and taking risks are the major characteristics that set leading apart from managing. Visions, dreams, and creative possibilities give direction to the individual and to the group. Ordinary leaders may have a vision but many times fail to get support or fail to take the necessary actions and risks to make it come to fruition. The extraordinary leader, on the other hand, is able to obtain support and willing to take the necessary risks to achieve the vision. Both successful and unsuccessful people have dreams; however, successful people take necessary actions to fulfill their dreams.

Engage in Self-reflection and Self-improvement. Looking in the mirror (physically and metaphorically), reflecting on strengths and weaknesses, evaluating feedback from others (verbal and body language), and determining direction for self-improvement are activities extraordinary leaders take upon themselves regularly. They work toward excellence. In that same vein, although they work to be of service, they know that they cannot please everyone and avoid trying to do so. A good end-of-day activity that was mentioned in one interview was that of evaluating one's daily servant-leadership. This person makes an imaginary continuum with *Servant-leadership Activities* placed at one end and *Self-serving Activities* placed at the other end. Next, the person then places an imaginary mark on the continuum to indicate how much of the day was actually spent on those types of activities. If the mark is 30% or better for servant-leadership activities, the person is happy with the day. If it is lower than 30%, a note is written in the person's day timer as a reminder for the next day.

Think Positively and Keep A Good Sense of Humor. *Some people complain that roses have thorns, whereas some people are happy that some thorns have roses.* This is a twist on the classical half-full or half-empty glass, but it's a point well taken. Some people always look on the negative side of things and see themselves as victims, blaming someone else or something like bad luck for what they have, or don't have, and what they get. Extraordinary leaders take responsibility for what they can control and let go of what they cannot. They look for the positive humor in human foibles and try to find something good to learn from mistakes and even tragedies. To stay positive, they turn jokes on themselves rather than putting others down. Sarcasm is used rarely but wisely. In addition, they intentionally try to get others to laugh. People respect others who keep a good sense of humor, can laugh at themselves, and continually give others laughs.

Touch, Move and Inspire Others. Whereas ordinary leaders and managers rely on money, material items, political maneuvering and even intimidation to motivate their people, extraordinary leaders strive to touch, move and inspire the people they lead. They encourage people to follow their dreams and be the best they can possibly be; they coach and mentor others; help others to solve their challenges in life; and, most importantly, they give inspiration and hope rather than despair.

REFERENCES: People in my interviews consistently referred to following books. I suggest them to the readers who want to learn more about extraordinary leadership and extraordinary people. *The Private Writings of Robert K. Greenleaf: On Becoming A Servant Leader*, edited by Don Frick and Larry Spears, Stephen Covey's *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, David Chadwick's *The 12 Leadership Principles of Dean Smith*, and the entire series of *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, edited by Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen.

Avery M. Henderson, Ph.D., M.P.H., is a motivational speaker, trainer, humorist and "edu-tainer" who lives in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. He is the owner of Henderson and Associates, a motivational speaking, human performance and training business. His mission statement is "Helping to raise corporate productivity and morale through positive living and working principles, emphasizing humor, creativity, teamwork, peaceful conflict resolution and servant-leadership." He has over 25 years of experience speaking, teaching and training. Business telephone: 919-968-3763; e-mail: avery@whoopeedoo.com, web site: www.whoopeedoo.com.