



A Simple Leadership Philosophy: Take Care of Your People!

by Tony Crites



J.W. Marriott said, “If you take care of your people, they will take care of your customers and your business will take care of itself.” That statement still holds true to organizations today. So why do companies struggle with the idea that taking care of their employees does not have an impact on the bottom-line of the organization?

Our Agency has the same concerns as any other organization; income, expenses, performance, quality services, and bottom-line. These are tangible things on which many organizations put the majority of their focus as an indicator of success. We do it because it is easy to see positive versus negative. It is easy to see success, or a lack thereof, in the numbers. However, this is only one indicator of a successful organization. Often times, we as leaders overlook the most important part of our agencies and businesses - our employees!

Our leadership team started with the idea that if we take care of our employees, then they would take care of our customers and the bottom-line would take care of itself. How did we do that?

First, we had to change our leadership philosophy. Our focus primarily had been on the bottom-line. The numbers influenced our decisions and the direction of the Division.

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Leadership Philosophy (cont.)

Second, we decided to invest more in our supervisors by showing them there was more to the organization than the bottom-line and trusting them to run their programs. We turned the focus from a top-down leadership style to a servant leadership style that provides our supervisors the training, tools, and support to be successful at their jobs. We then encouraged the same behavior to be transferred to our front-line employees.

And finally, patience. We knew the change would take time and we needed to be patient to let the improvements take place.

We focused our leadership efforts in five areas; Work/Life Balance, Communications, Accountability, Recognitions, and Empowerment (WeCARE). Our leadership team adopted these five behaviors and started to use them to make a powerful change to our organization. These five behaviors would lead to two major impacts to our Division. The first was a change in leadership culture. The second was an increase in employee engagement.



When our focus shifted from a purely bottom-line organization to one that ensured we were living, exhibiting, and encouraging these five leadership behaviors, several things changed. We saw an improvement in trust in the Division. We saw an increase in cooperation between the programs. We saw an increase in innovation and new ideas. As the culture started to change, our employees became highly engaged in the success of the team and the Division.

Once those things took hold the bottom-line took care of itself. We still monitor and watch all the financial numbers closely and use them as a tool to move our Division ahead, but it is not the main driver of new programs and innovation in our organization.

This idea has actually allowed our team to be more innovative and has put the focus on providing the highest quality training and technical assistance for our customers. And, as J.W. Marriott said, "The business takes care of itself."



Note: Tony Crites is Associate Division Director for TEEX's Infrastructure Training and Safety Institute