

LEADERSHIP Excellence

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THE MAGAZINE OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT, MANAGERIAL EFFECTIVENESS, AND ORGANIZATIONAL PRODUCTIVITY

JANUARY 2009

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master the hard skills of your job as well as the soft skills of interpersonal relations. Interpersonal skills must be a focus of your leadership development.”

Because most leaders believe they have strong interpersonal skills, they need to see an objective measure of their skills (often in the form of a multi-rater or 360-degree assessment). After they complete a questionnaire about themselves with input from colleagues, direct reports, and boss, they need to see an evaluation of their interpersonal skills and behavioral preferences, showing strengths and weaknesses as well as highlighting areas where their self-ratings are different from those provided by others. The report will identify specific areas that can limit the leader’s interpersonal effectiveness and performance. Areas that can be affected by interpersonal shortcomings include the person’s ability to establish rapport, give and receive feedback, communicate, or manage/delegate work assignments effectively.

An objective report showing that the leader’s self-perception of their abilities differs from others provides opportunity for improvement. While some people will shrug off the data, most leaders find the information to be eye-opening and use it as a launching pad for personal improvement. It creates a highly “teachable moment.”

Leaders recognize they’re not being as effective with others as they want. One-on-one coaching or workshop training programs are effective ways to explore interpersonal effectiveness issues and build specific skills.

You can improve your interpersonal skills by identifying the behavioral preferences of others and work in a way that makes them comfortable.

Take these four basic steps:

1. Know yourself—understand your behavioral preferences.
2. Control yourself—don’t let those preferences dominate interactions.
3. Know others—note the behavioral preferences of your key relationships.
4. Do something for others—accommodate preferences of key relationships.

You can easily learn these skills and quickly see results. Often, just making an effort to work better with others increases productivity.

Interpersonal skills never become obsolete. Apply the principles of effective relationships to keep moving to next levels of leadership. **LE**

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ACTION: Improve your interpersonal skills.

Moral Courage

It’s the hallmark of leadership.



by Lance Secretan

COURAGE IS MENTAL or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty. Inspirational leaders embody mental, moral, and spiritual courage. Followers abhor cowards and love leaders with mettle—it’s that simple. And smart leaders do what works.

We use the word *courage* to describe firefighters, police, and paramedics at their best and also to describe whistle blowers who expose corruption. In the first instance, a person’s life is in danger because of the physical risks; in the second case, people are risking their jobs by telling the truth—one is physically courageous, and the other is morally courageous.

In corporate life, we are infrequently required to display physical courage; but we are required to display moral courage daily.

Breakthroughs cannot be made without enormous effort sustained over time. In every field, entrenched, traditional beliefs present insurmountable hurdles to achieving the remarkable. This thinking is old-fashioned and unnecessary.

For some, skiing is dangerous and frightening. As an expert teacher of skiing, I run a *Leadership Summit* program in which we enable skiers of intermediate ability to overcome their fears so that they can ski moguls (bumps) in their first half day and double black diamond runs (experts only) by the end of the day. Many teachers say this is impossible, but we do it all the time. We do this because we use skiing as a metaphor—as it goes on the mountain, so it goes at work. The U.S. ski industry includes 600 resorts, 29,000 professional ski instructors, and 26,000 ski patrollers, all of whom have a vested interest in keeping a skier or snowboarder on a slow learning track. It helps maintain a continuing flow of repeat business, but it doesn’t lead to rapid, radical breakthroughs in skiing ability.

The “business” of leadership has the same inbuilt inertia—hundreds of thousands of consultants, academics, writers

for learned journals, training executives, and coaches have a similar vested interest in dragging out the process of leadership development. As an expert teacher on leadership and inspiration, I help organizations and individuals achieve the same rapid, radical breakthroughs in a remarkably short period of time—just as we do in skiing. The secret to making a breakthrough in leadership or skiing is the same—courage and trust. It amazes me that so many skiers remain average or mediocre year after year, when they do not need to be. I’m equally amazed to see the same thing happen in organizations.

Perhaps we’re losing the strength of our courage muscles. In choosing how we lead, we exercise self-imposed limitations. Yet people regularly achieve breakthroughs in their experiences—the meaning and fulfillment of their work, the results they inspire from people, the fortunes they make from doing what they love—and we all have the

power to do the same. As Buckminster Fuller said, we must “dare to be naïve.”

Each winter, leaders from around the world visit with me in Colorado to learn how to ski and lead better. Both can be achieved in a fraction of the time we expect—if we have passion, willingness to learn and change, a desire to improve,

and a belief that there are no limits. We might call this courage.

In teaching and leading others, you must earn and build trusting relationships with followers. Trust creates a loving space in which experimentation and challenge can occur, in which you can let go of “certainties.” This leads to change—and in change there is power. It takes little courage to cling to the stillness of the status quo. Movement and change, which involves letting go of the familiar while embracing the new, require courage.

As Maya Angelou put it: “One isn’t necessarily born with courage, but one is born with potential. Without courage, we cannot practice any other virtue with consistency. We can’t be kind, true, merciful, generous, or honest.”

Paradoxically, safety comes from the adventurous and the exciting, not from the failing systems of the past. In this way, we sacrifice what we are for what we can become. **LE**

Lance Secretan is an expert in leadership development and author of ONE: The Art and Practice of Conscious Leadership. Visit www.Secretan.com.

ACTION: Cultivate the courage to change.

