



Leaders Pursue the Best

BY RANDY G. PENNINGTON

“The most important decision we ever made.” That’s how Carl Sewell describes his company’s decision to be the best. Carl owns auto dealerships, twelve of them to be exact. His Cadillac and Lexus dealerships rank at or near the top in both U.S. sales and service every year.

Carl knows what every leader knows—the decision to pursue the best rather than the easiest changes you. As he told me, “It makes life simpler, more fun and definitely more profitable.”

Here’s what he means:

- Decisions become easier when you have a clear standard against which to evaluate your choices.
- Achieving results makes everyone happier, and that usually leads to even better performance.
- Given a choice, we would all prefer to deal with people who have a reputation for being the best at what they do.

Of course, like every other leader who consistently delivers results, Carl admits that there are days when he and his company are not the best. But that never changes the goal. It simply serves as a reminder that there is more work to be done.

Here are three ideas to help you and your team pursue the best over what’s easiest.

Relish the opportunity to show what you can do. The best leaders have a confidence about them. It’s not arrogance or a “win at all costs” mentality. Their confidence flows from a deep passion for competing, contributing

and yes, winning. It’s being dissatisfied with the status quo, always reinventing, and never resting on your laurels. It’s caring so much that you work your tail off to deliver better results today than you did yesterday.

Michael Jordan, one of the greatest basketball players of all time, described it this way, “Whether I was competing with my siblings or trying to get attention from my parents, I wanted to show what I could do, what I was capable of accomplishing. My focus was to be the best player in whatever sport I played. That’s all I ever thought about.”

Do you relish the opportunity to show what you can do?

Prepare, gather constant feedback, and adjust. Baseball player Albert Pujols could easily be confused with a hitting machine. He was the first player to hit 30 homeruns in each of his first five major league seasons. In 2010, he led Major League Baseball in batting average, slugging and on-base percentage. In fact, ESPN named him the greatest player of the last decade.

Pujol’s physical talent is unquestionable. But what separates him from those with similar physical gifts is his relentless commitment to preparation, constant feedback and quick adjustments. He has a defined and deliberate process. Before every game, he watches at least 40 minutes of video on the opposing pitcher, as well as his previous game’s performance. He puts in time at the batting cage. He stands virtually behind home plate to watch for any in-game adjustments an opponent has made. If he is called out, he often goes to the video room during the game to review his performance, and then he changes his plan.

How do you approach preparation? How do you react to feedback? And how do you make adjustments when things don’t go your way? Do you change the goal or change the process?

Show the discipline and courage of accountability. Michael Jordan rarely had two off nights in a row. It the same for every person or group pursuing the best results over the easiest. They overcome performance lapses quickly before they become a habit.

More importantly, the best performers think differently. When presented with an important decision, they ask, “Will this help us be the best?” When presented with a choice, they take the time to ask, “Is this the best or is this the easiest?”

What is your level of accountability? What questions do you ask when presented with an important decision or choice?

The level of commitment and accountability within your organization is in direct correlation to the quality and accountability of your leadership. You either accept responsibility for your actions and decisions or you don’t. You either create an environment that allows people to pursue excellence or you don’t.

Which is it for you - the best or the easiest? To quote a wise philosopher, “If you really want to do something, you will find a way. If you don’t, you will find an excuse.”

Randy Pennington is author of Results Rule! Build a Culture that Blows the Competition Away and On My Honor, I Will.. He helps leaders build cultures committed to results, relationships and accountability.

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