

Leading for the Future

BY RANDY G. PENNINGTON



In one of my training sessions, a student asked me, “What will it take to be successful as a leader in the future?” He had an earnest desire to find that one leadership model that would ensure success. I sensed his frustration with my response of, “It depends.”

What makes a successful leader is the subject of thousands of books and even more articles, blogs and YouTube videos. Examples of exceptional leadership range from extraordinary achievers such as George Washington to fictional characters like Santa Claus.

The challenge is finding the right model that fits your strengths and situation. Former Apple CEO Steve Jobs was known for a rather caustic interpersonal style as a leader. That worked for him, but imagine the result if you were to use that approach while leading a team of volunteers for IRWA.

Customize Your Leadership Approach

Integrity and a bias for action are the fundamentals for all successful leaders. With them, you can customize your leadership style to the situation while knowing that you are operating from a foundation of credibility and trust. Without them, you are doomed to leadership mediocrity.

Every situation is different – even within an organization like IRWA. But you are not likely to go wrong if your approach to leading others also includes the following principles:

Passion: The individuals and groups you lead are waiting to be inspired and engaged. They want to feel connected to something important, and they are waiting and

watching to see if you fill that role. John Wesley, the 18th century evangelist noted, “When you set yourself on fire, people love to come and see you burn.”

Courage: You demonstrate courage when you refuse to give up on what you believe simply because of fear and doubt. It doesn’t matter if you are challenging the status quo, ending a practice that is no longer relevant or standing up for what is right. Be bold in your action, be resolute in your principles and be honest in your communications.

Preparation: If a leader is unsuccessful, chances are good that they haven’t adequately prepared. What is the information you need to be successful in your leadership role? What are the changes, threats and opportunities? Become a student of your business, industry and profession.

Serving: Imagine if we moved from providing service to others to actually serving them—not from a position of weakness, but out of a desire to ensure that their highest needs are met. Providing great customer service allows us to meet the needs, wants and expectations of our customers or constituents. Of course, this is a worthwhile goal, but think about what might be possible if you operated from the perspective of serving.

Kindness: While not often discussed as an important leadership principle, kindness and graciousness command respect. Kindness breeds civility, and in doing so, increases the opportunity for collaboration, while earning trust and opening the door for honest discourse.

Sustainability: This principle applies in virtually every area of our lives, including our leadership responsibilities.

Sustainability requires that we look beyond the immediate decision to anticipate the consequences, both intended and unintended. It challenges us to think of the impact of our choices and practice stewardship of our resources.

Accountability: Responsibility is given. Accountability is responsibility accepted freely and without reservation. Most of the challenges that we face today have identifiable solutions. We know how to create a great member experience at our chapter and region meetings. We know what it takes to keep promises and commitments. We even know what is required to solve many of the problems in our families, schools and communities. We don’t need more information, and if we do, it is readily available. The world needs more leaders who demonstrate accountability.

One thing is certain, the legendary leaders of the future will be known for their results. They will have a reputation for credibility and trust. And they will inspire and empower others to achieve more than they thought possible in pursuit of something they embrace as important.

What principles and traits do you believe are important for leaders in the future? Visit IRWA’s Facebook page and let us know the leadership traits you believe will be important in the future. Simply click on the Facebook icon on IRWA’s name page. Your responses will be published in an upcoming issue of the magazine.



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. Send your ideas to Randy@penningtongroup.com. Follow his blog at www.penningtongroup.com.