



HOW TO BUILD LEADERS

The future of the right of way industry

BY DUSTIN WEAVER



A little over 10 years ago, a right of way manager requested a meeting with me to discuss what it means to manage and develop leaders in the right of way industry. At this point, I had been in the business just shy of two years and had been assigned to some of the highest priority and most complex projects, which I oversaw from cradle to completion. Although I thought I was well-versed in managing the right of way business, a meeting with someone of his credentials was intimidating to say the least.

Contrary to what I expected, he didn't start with the development of my skills. Instead, he wanted to invest in my ability to lead by illustrating the importance of understanding the people and talents in a group in addition to what the business required to be successful. We reviewed overall project status reports for "big picture" thinking to challenge my reasoning. He then introduced me to budget allocations, estimating,

cost strategy, scope and methods for creating functional relationships. Little did I know that these short assignments were shaping my value system toward the business and my future leadership skills.

Over the last 12 years, the Oil and Gas industry has brought about a lot of changes as the markets have ridden highs and lows not seen for 30 years. This change in the industry has contributed to a change in the right of way workforce. Talented land professionals have left the industry, moved to other shale-producing regions or shifted careers to other responsibilities out of the land field. With this scarcity, it is more important than ever

to invest the proper time in creating strong leaders to run your projects and businesses. This development will continue to be important as the right of way workforce starts to mature and many managers and directors start to retire.

As the famed football player and coach Vince Lombardi says, "Leaders aren't born, they are made. And they are made just like anything else, through hard work. And that's the price we'll have to pay to achieve that goal, or any goal." This is certainly the case for the right of way industry. The following are recommendations to aid in developing your future leaders through the investment of time, coaching and performance feedback.

Lead By Example

"Lead by example" may seem cliché, but as leaders we have to emulate the actions, responses and performance we want out of our teams. We have to earn our leadership everyday. But this can be harder to accomplish than one might think, especially with lean workforces, tight deadlines and the many hats that the leader may already be wearing. To do this, carve out some time each day to reflect on your strategy for getting your team to engage in your vision for success. Use this strategy to complete more priority items that are instrumental to the organization's success. Once you have organized your day or week, it is easier to assign work to your team.

Next, ensure you fully understand on what level of experience your team is currently operating at using a project matrix with a responsibility chart. By laying out your team's abilities, you are able to begin the process of understanding and identifying gaps. The matrix will help in finding creative and respectful ways to engage your team members to meet goals at their associated level.

Lastly, monitor and reflect on your own actions with your team. Any time is a great time to modify your behavior to make your team more efficient and

successful. To have a highly effective team, everyone needs to practice trust, compassion and motivation to meet a common goal. As the leader, it is your duty to set the tone for this engagement.

Performance Feedback

Providing performance monitoring and feedback is a crucial step in the development process. This is the equivalent to providing a roadmap to a wayward driver. To properly move through this process, there needs to be real trust between the leader and the members of their team. Trust enables the team to fully believe that the leader has their best interest in mind.

Feedback conversations will not always be easy, but that is why a good manager has a game plan. Start with taking a good long look at the person's body of work, attitude and passion for the job. This will enable you to rate the person or place them in a matrix to accurately depict where they are on the learning curve. Next, use performance monitoring to check with their peers, functional leads and project accomplishments. Create mutual respect between the parties by celebrating the successes while at the same time challenging future goals. Lastly, create objectives in order to round out their skill set. These objectives must match the project requirements or business initiatives.

Stretch Job Assignments

Team members must be challenged with new job assignments that stretch their abilities and comfort levels in order to rise to future expectations. In this day and age, it is merely too easy to become complacent or stagnant in the same job or set of responsibilities. To develop future leaders, assigning a stretch job assignment can provide the opportunity for potential leaders to build character under the adversity of learning new skills. Create a new source of motivation to provide additional value to the company. These

assignments should encourage them to reach out to peers for assistance, build outside relationships and grow confidence in themselves to make decisions independently.

This step will require additional coaching and mentoring, while also pushing them to overcome barriers on their own. Author Napoleon Hill once said, "It is literally true that you can succeed best and quickest by helping others to succeed." Whether these land professionals are new to the industry or just specialized in one skill, being trained and developed properly will be pivotal in ensuring that the next generation of leaders will be just as successful as the last.

Bringing It All Together

This loop of coaching, mentoring, challenging and providing feedback will become an organic process that changes and evolves for each group and business as the organization grows. The investment into these potential leaders in the land profession will carry vast dividends over the sacrifices made today. It is our duty as the leaders of today to prepare the next generation to take on the ever-changing social, political and geographical challenges that the right of way industry will present in the future. Therefore, be bold and develop your teams into the future leaders that the industry will so desperately need in this next decade and beyond. ⭐



Dustin Weaver is a Land Manager for Williams Companies. He holds an MBA from Baylor University and is licensed as a Texas real estate broker.