

Reinvent Yourself Before Reinventing Your Company

Companies that make significant improvements and attain continuous success are always led by an executive or an executive team with a vision. But, while this is important and necessary, it isn't the only determining factor in the company's success. Even more important, from a very practical standpoint, is the fact that these key executives are effective. They know their business, know what they need to accomplish and, most importantly, know how to accomplish it efficiently.

They surround themselves with an infrastructure that ensures they will be successful. They understand the importance of efficient systems, streamlined workflows, customer focused organization structures, detailed accountability and integrated success measures. They understand the value of an operation that has been designed to be successful.

Which comes first, effective leaders or a well designed operation, is a "chicken and egg" question. You need both, but if we have to pick one over the other, we pick the leadership. We say this because a knowledgeable and effective leader understands the results that need to be attained and will usually find a way to build an effective infrastructure. But turning a well designed operation over to an ineffective manager is like giving a formula one racing car to a novice driver. It's not only wasteful, he might hurt someone.

So how do you get to be an effective leader? First, let's look at the fundamentals just like we would if you wanted to redesign your company or department. Let's take a "clean slate" look at you. Start by answering the following questions:

- Where are you going? What are your goals? Are they consistent with what your company needs? If you work hard and get the right results can you become successful at your company?

Your answers to these questions are important because, if you want to be a great leader, this should be the last time you think about yourself. Your focus from this point forward needs to be on creating the best results for your team, department or company. Accepting this unselfish way of operating will unleash your true potential and allow you to obtain results that are out of reach to those who are mostly focused on their own benefit.

Some may be skeptical at this point. Admittedly, this is a long term strategy for success. Operating in this manner may mean that someone else may, from time to time, get undeserved credit or even take credit from you. In the long term, however, the amount of things you will be able to accomplish and the success you will create or participate in will overwhelm any short term benefits you lose. It's amazing what you can accomplish when you don't worry about who will get the credit.

- How much of your time each day is spent on meaningful work? How much do you spend on getting needed results? How much time is wasted on routine activities that don't have a clear result for either your area of responsibility or the company? How much of your time do you control and how effectively do you use this precious resource?

The measure of any effective person is what he or she accomplishes, not what they do or how much time they spend doing it. Most jobs, however, include the need to do necessary work that is unlikely to create any meaningful value. To be truly effective, leaders need to do this type of work as quickly as possible and then spend their time on what is important. Most effective managers are able to get the necessary part of their job done in half their time. This leaves the other half as discretionary time, to be spent truly adding value.

In other words, effective leaders have designed their work and time so they control most of it and they spend it on creating meaningful results.

- Do you have a management process? Do the people who report to you, or who you work with regularly, understand what their responsibilities are, what yours are and how to most effectively interact to get the best results? Is this process, assuming you have one, working well or poorly? If you don't know, ask.

To be effective, you need to be easy to work with. In part you need to be consistent. People need to know what to expect. They need to know when to include you in decisions, when to include you in conversations and when to just keep you informed. You should have a process for communicating the usual information so key items will get the special attention they deserve.

People need to know what they are accountable for and how much discretion they have in making decisions. They need to know where the boundaries of their authority are. When they bring you into a decision they need to feel comfortable that it will happen efficiently, easily and quickly.

- Do you lead or manage? How much of your time is spent doing the work of your area versus doing supportive and development things that will make the people that report to you more effective? Do your employees trust you? Have you built a team?

The most effective leaders don't do a lot of technical work. Instead they use their time to make the people that report to them more efficient and effective. In many ways, they spend their time serving the people that report to them. To some this may seem an upside down way of thinking about an organization structure. But it isn't. At the top of your chart should be your customer, because that is the person being ultimately served. Next are the people in your unit who do the direct work of servicing this customer. At the bottom is you. Your job is to help your employees do their jobs better.

- Are you improving? Do you have a plan and are you working it? Are the improvements you're making for yourself having a positive impact on the people around you? Leaders are followed for a reason. Has anyone followed you recently?

Leadership is like a tree. When it stops growing, it dies. Few companies or operations ever reach the level of success where they are "good enough." Besides, only a fool would say they were ever good enough.

If you'd like to know more about how to achieve these results, please call me or visit our website at McDonaldConsultingGroup.Com. We'd love to help. It's what we do. We have an article in the National Underwriter for the week of July 21st. It's about change and the way various companies deal with it. We think you'll enjoy it.