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Leadership Is All About The Little Things

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We have all suffered through unforgettably bad bosses, but there is usually at least one incredible leader who evokes some of our best memories. Maybe he/she was a mentor, friend, or confidante, but something about them motivated you. You wanted to work harder for them. You wanted to be better for them. If you didn't give your best effort for that leader, you felt guilty. But what was it about that leader that inspired you? Can you put your finger on some identifiable trait that made him/her so different?

You may not be able to explain exactly what it was, but there was just something in the person's leadership that drew you to them. In today's terminology, your best leader would probably be referred to as a transformational leader. Bernard Bass helped provide a modern-day definition of transformational leadership by developing four distinct components: Idealized Influence (actions speak louder than words), Intellectual Stimulation (thinking outside of the box), Inspirational Motivation (exciting the masses, sharing the vision) and Individualized Consideration (compassionate leader).[1] Numerous studies have shown how transformational leadership is by far the most effective form of leadership practiced today.

A transformational leader is someone who does not rely on carrots or sticks to get his/her followers to accomplish the mission. This leader doesn't lead through fear and intimidation, but rather by respect and compassion. Instead of telling you what to do, this leader allows you to connect the dots and figure things out on your own. A transformational leader is able to empathize with you knowing when to offer encouraging words as well as when to give you a firm push. Oftentimes, this type of leader engages in small, subtle yet powerful gestures which show you how much this leader cares about you.

A sheriff in a small town utilized transformational leadership every Christmas. The Christmas day shift was always loaded with younger officers as shifts were handed out based on seniority. No one wanted to work on Christmas day but obligations of a police department never take a day off. Roll call occurred every morning at 6:00 A.M. On Christmas, the officers were surprised to see the sheriff present and dressed in uniform. As roll call was about to start, the sheriff called out two deputy's names and told them to go home. Unbeknownst to them, they had been previously selected by the sheriff because they had young kids at home. The sheriff told the young deputies that he was going to take their shift for the day and they were not to worry; they would still get paid as if they worked. These deputies went home and had the sheer joy of watching their young children eagerly ripping through presents that Santa had left the previous night.

Will those deputies ever forget what the sheriff did for them? Will they run through a brick wall if the sheriff asked? John Wooden, former basketball coach at UCLA, said this about leadership, "No one cares until they know how much you care." [2] What little things are you doing to show your followers how much you care?

[1]Barbuto, John E. & Cummins-Brown, Lance L. (2007). Full Range Leadership, University of Nebraska, Lincoln Extension, Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources. Taken from the Internet on July 22, 2015 at <http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/pages/publicationD.jsp?publicationId=198>

[2] Wooden, John & Jamison, Steve (2009). Coach Wooden's Leadership Game Plan For Success, McGraw Hill, New York, NY