



Reprinted from the June/July 2011 issue of BIC

Family leadership: A critical component

Leadership is the ability to decide what is to be done, and then to get others to want to do it.” — Dwight D. Eisenhower. “A manager defines how to scale a wall, and a leader, on the other hand, defines which wall to scale.” — Anonymous. These two quotes both point to the reality that in family business, generally there is equal need of managers with leadership qualities, and leaders with dynamic leadership skills.

Research conducted in family business success denotes family owned companies that survive through and beyond the founder’s generation need leaders who are managers because the jobs, futures and potential fortune of everyone in the company are dependent upon them. “Management leadership” combines the “how” to do the job coupled with the “what and the why.” The issue now becomes what qualities these leaders require.

Some people believe leaders are born, some say they are “called,” others contend they are “made” by the times. However they come into being, leadership theorists have found certain demonstrable qualities are shared. Let’s take a look. (Which ones do you associate with yourself?)

- Influences
- Envisions
- Energizes
- Communicates
- Develops teams
- Shares knowledge
- Motivates
- Follows through
- Investigates
- Organizes
- Welcomes change

- Values integrity

These are all essential qualities family members and employees expect in a leader. How these expectations are met, or not met, is what determines a leader’s credibility factor. Credibility may well be one of the most difficult attributes for a leader to earn, and one of the easiest to lose.

According to authors Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner, there are several strategies leaders can take to build and maintain their credibility while leading the company to success.

1. Clarify your values. It is important for leaders to communicate their values to everyone. Those values are the foundation on which everything else is built. Conveying who you are, your goals and what you stand for can have significant impact upon performance and attitudes.

2. Identify what your staff wants. Employees are unanimous in naming responsiveness to their needs and concerns as a key factor they look for in a leader. Leaders who act only in their own self-interest eventually lose the trust of those they lead.

3. Build consensus. Employees want leaders who trust the experience and ideas of those they lead; they want leaders who seek and respect their input. While staff understands it is the leader who must ultimately make the decision, they also know credible leaders include and involve their staff in charting a course and setting standards. When a leader doesn’t collaborate with his team, the message the team receives is that their ideas are not important or trustworthy. This is not a message that

contributes to a leader’s credibility.

4. Communicate shared values with enthusiasm. Enthusiasm emerges as a crucial leadership quality. The company needs leaders who can communicate shared values with ardor and conviction. It wants leaders who have energy, who become involved, who express their genuine passion for what the organization is working to accomplish. Enthusiasm is contagious! Barry Posner reminds us, “You can’t light a fire with a wet match.”

Credibility may well be one of the most difficult attributes for a leader to earn, and one of the easiest to lose.

5. Lead by example. Employees expect their leaders to do more than lead; they expect them to teach and develop leadership within their organization, and do this by example. People believe action over words every time. To be credible, a leader must be a role model. Leaders cannot hold others responsible for shared values when they don’t live by those values themselves.

A final word: Leadership is also about building relationships. Relationships are continually developed by constantly communicating, listening, being compassionate, being truthful about circumstances, keeping promises of all magnitudes, and most importantly, developing trust.

For more information on Dr. White’s programs and publications, visit www.successimages.com or call (225) 769-2307. ●