

Looking for Balance

By Bruce Dingman

As we look for the best leaders in any given executive search, our attention is always drawn to appropriate balance.

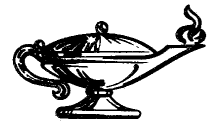
The great leader is both goal-oriented and sensitive. He doesn't shy away from hard decisions, nor does he function only when others approve of his decision. On the other hand, the great leader is not an insensitive task master, a domineering employer or an opinionated boss who shuns a differing viewpoint. Rather, the executive has a combination of both qualities--resulting in someone who is sensitive and results oriented, who values the opinions of others while making decisions that will affect them.

The great leader is self-confident. She has a healthy esteem of herself while not displaying excessive arrogance or cockiness. She knows herself well, and works out of her strengths. The leader might even range from being quite confident, quietly confident, to even slightly insecure with surges of healthy confidence. But she should not be significantly insecure. An important part of self-confidence in the leader is knowledge of how her confidence shows itself, how others see it and how they react to it.

The wise executive has learned how to multi-task effectively, balancing his hours inside and outside of the office. While working 50 or 60 hours can be reasonable (though longish), the leader should find time for the needs of his family and for personal renewal. If the leader is truly driven, his self worth may be tied up in the position he holds--leading to an unhealthy lifestyle. Because the executive is an example of leadership that others should emulate, the leader should prioritize his time to both work hard and nourish his family relationships. When subordinates see this style of balance, they are apt to work in a similar fashion. This goes a long way towards maximizing the organization's human assets.

The great leader will not only be balanced in her personal life, but she will also be balanced in how she deals with subordinates. The best executive will know her employees well; she will sense how much pushing a person can take, challenge workers in manageable doses, and excel at stretching an employee to grow. To push people until they break may help the organization reach short term production goals, but will often backfire in the long run--causing the employee to break under pressure or despair in failing to reach the goal. However, to only stretch people to the level they want will often result in a lack of their maximizing their potential. Personal growth in the employee will result when they stretch to new challenges. The great leader will spur growth in her employees in several areas: quantity or quality of work produced, ability to influence or lead others and motivation to keep learning or growing.

When the excellent leader has stretched his workers in a balanced manner, he should also be generous with praise where it is due. Such encouragement to a worker, a psychological



reward, will motivate him to give the company his best. The executive, however, needs to know the balance between starving his employees of praise, and applying it so frequently that it ceases to mean anything. It is a wonderful thing to see the boss making a practice of "celebrating successes," whether for the individual, the department, or the whole team. Oftentimes a publicly given "attaboy," or a spur of the moment pizza party after winning a new contract, can mean more than financial rewards. Making people feel valued and appreciated is an important part of leadership.

Balance--without it an otherwise great leader would not be maximizing the potential results of his leadership.

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