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Leaders have to walk the talk

Ray Williams

Few topics have received more attention than that of leadership. There are more than 20,000 books on the subject. Many models of leadership have been advocated and become the basis for training and selection. Of all of the ideas regarding leadership, one of the most compelling and appropriate to modern times, is the notion that great leaders are value shapers.

Drs. Kevin Frieberg and Jackie Frieberg (*GUTS! Companies that Blow the Doors Off Business-as-Usual, and NUTS! Southwest Airlines Crazy Recipe for Business and Personal Success*), argue that great companies are driven by strong value shapers.

Every company builds its reputation on a set of values. The question is whether the values driving the business have been haphazardly acquired or purposefully instilled, protected and promoted. Great leaders understand it is within their capacity to shape values and inculcate them through personal example. The way people think about customers and their impressions of right and wrong are influenced by whether their leaders live out their organization's values.

If you want to identify the true character and personality of an organization, skip the values statement on the office wall and observe the way people act in ordinary, everyday events. Then examine the company's systems, strategy, structure and policies. Look to see whether the espoused values are practiced day in and day out. Do the leaders appear to operate out of personal integrity? Do they walk the talk? When there is a disconnect between the espoused values and what is practiced, it's called hypocrisy. Leaders, who operate out of hypocrisy, breed compliance and fear because they lack influence and must rely on authority and the use of power to get things done. In the long run, mere compliance

will take the organization only so far before people lose faith in their leaders.

A British study of 2,000 managers by the Chartered Management Institute in 2001 revealed that the single most important attribute most people want in leaders is inspiration. Yet only 11% actually saw an "ability to inspire" in their leaders.

Leadership depends on trust and credibility to function properly. That is why leaders must find a way to close the gap between the espoused values of the company and those they practice. Credibility exists in the eyes of those who are led, not in the eyes of the leaders.

Leaders, who live their values, inspire tremendous sense of commitment and loyalty in employees. As a result they expand their influence and their ability to effect change. With value-based leaders, people develop the necessary hope, passion, and perseverance to meet the demands of an unforgiving marketplace.



Ray Williams is Executive Vice-President of **Premier Career Management Group (PCMG)**, a career management and executive development firm in Vancouver. Ray is also President of the International Coach Federation, Vancouver, and an executive coach with international clients.

rwilliams@pcmgcanada.com

www.pcmgexecutive.com

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