

Collaboration: stop barking and start wandering

By Rick Maier

Too many executives spend their day being a Big Shot, getting deeply involved in a whole range of details, barking orders and satisfying their need to feel needed.

“Leaders” spend their time dealing with strategic planning, exceptions and projects, and don’t expend a whole lot of energy doing original work. They want to be less needed and work hard to reduce their team’s dependence on them.

Which of the following describes you?

Big Shot: Every minute of the day from 8 to 5 is scheduled. Your secretary spends her day changing and managing your schedule for delays, and apologizing to people waiting to see you. You stay in your office most of the day, making lots of decisions, sending for people and assigning work. If you don’t come to work, things don’t get done.

Leader: When you’re not out visiting customers, you wander around the office visiting employees and attending some quick meetings. You spend lots of time listening to a variety of front-line team players and soliciting feedback on key strategies.

You do as much interviewing as you can, and spend plenty of time motivating the over-achievers and rehabilitating the underachievers. If you are out, the place operates the same as when you’re there.

Each of us is probably a mixture of both styles. Even though the world is getting more inclusive and collegiate, there are still plenty of Big Shots. The more we recognize the direct link between a company’s level of collaboration and their financial performance, the more managers cross over into the enlightened world.

Empowerment goes hand in hand with collaboration. Empowerment is more than delegating and soliciting opinions, it means handing over the entire responsibility, asking someone to “own” the job and be accountable for the results – to be involved from the beginning to the end, from cradle to grave.

You may have to search hard to find employees who really want to be empowered. The world is full of people who want to come to work, do a job and go home. They have been conditioned to leave their brains at the door, and are accustomed to the boss-worker mentality.

I have had the great fortune to be part of two empowered, collaborative enterprises. It is nothing short of miraculous how much ordinary people can accomplish when you give them some direction and tools, then get out of their way. It’s fun to come to work. Even

though there are many things you could do faster or better yourself (the first time), an enlightened Leader knows that the organization can't grow unless everyone steps up.

The Big Shot views employees as workers, another asset to manage. The Leader knows that there are plenty of other people who can do what they do, and that the only way to grow is to turn over what you are presently working on to the right people.

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