

The “Fab-Five” Leadership Principles of all Time

by : Dave Anderson

While there are many candidates for the “Fab-Five” leadership principles of all time, I list the following ones because of the impact they have in the context of business. As you read them determine how well you and your team live them because they will have profound influence on the sustainable success of your dealership.

1. Leaders are there to serve followers; the followers are not there to serve leaders. It’s the leader’s responsibility to add value to and serve the follower, not the other way around. As you add value to others as a priority, your efforts come back multiplied. Too many managers think otherwise. They think leadership is all about privilege and perks when it is about responsibility. In addition to serving the follower, it is the leader’s responsibility to connect with and establish a relationship with their followers. If you believe followers are kept around the dealership to serve you and for your personal enrichment and don’t understand you are there for them you know nothing of leadership. All you know is tyranny.

2. Don’t treat unequals equally. Leaders don’t define fairness as trying to be everything to everyone and by treating all alike. Leaders know that in the context of business, fairness doesn’t mean sameness; fairness means justice and justice means people get exactly what they have earned and deserve based on past performance – nothing more and nothing less. While everyone is held to the same standard of character, work ethic and customer care, leaders invest more time and resources where they get a return. This means that not everyone gets the same schedule, pay plan, time and attention, latitude or discretion. A primary responsibility of good leadership is to be a good steward of resources and not to squander them, and this can only be accomplished as you give your best to the best and less to the rest.

3. Building a foundation on moral sand doesn’t last. Leaders that last use the same standard of high moral ethics in their business life as in other areas of their life. As John Maxwell points out in his book, “There is No Such Thing as Business Ethics,” there are only ethics, period – not different styles for different situations. Too many leaders have one set of values they display at home and in church and while with friends -- and an entirely different and deficient set of ethics in business. While one can often rise to a position of prominence with bankrupt morals disguised, these bankrupt morals eventually rear their ugly head and the ensuing freefall from the sand foundation is astonishingly fast. Leaders that last make the right decision, not the convenient one. They know that when they face a crisis they will not be made but revealed. Thus they do the right things for the right reason and establish core values to measure others with and hold these behavioral metrics just as sacred as performance measures. If this sounds old-fashioned, that’s unfortunate. Not too long ago it was the corrupt that stood out as pariahs, not the virtuous.

4. Hold others accountable for results. Effective leaders care enough to confront employees who are off track, slacking, underperforming or otherwise not measuring up. They know that holding people accountable is nothing to apologize for. Instead, sugarcoating, trivializing and marginalizing performance issues for fear of offending and allowing their people to remain deluded and living in a gray area is something to apologize for. Leaders know that their first obligation is to the good of the organization and they cannot allow performance that damages the team to go on unchecked. They love the performer but hate the performance and realize that because someone cannot hit certain standards doesn’t mean they’re a bad person. It may just mean they are a bad fit for the position or the dealership has outgrown them. Thus, while good leaders impose consequences for poor performance and hold people accountable for results throughout the work process, they also know there comes a time when enough is enough and exercise the ultimate consequence: termination. One of the best lessons you can teach your people is that when they choose a behavior they choose the consequences for that behavior. In other words, when an employee chooses to come in late, chooses to project a lousy attitude, chooses

not to follow up with customers or adhere to company policy, they chose the pathetic paycheck that comes along with that behavior. No one did it to them; they did it to themselves. They are not victims.

5. You can't do it alone. Perhaps the greatest leadership lesson of all time is that you can't do it alone. You can look good for awhile doing it alone, carrying the load by yourself and being the one-man show. But eventually you'll run out of personal capacity and plateau. Anyone with substantial goals knows it will take a team to reach those goals. Climbing a molehill is easy for a loner but scaling Mt. Everest will take a team. Effective leaders also know that just because a group of people show up at the same place at the same time for a certain number of weeks, months or years doesn't necessarily mean a great team will ensue. Great teams are deliberately built. It takes a certain attitude and commitment from the leader to invest in others, share time, knowledge and power with them and make his or her people less dependent on them. They know that ultimately the greatest measure of their leadership is not how well their team does when they are breathing down their necks, but how their people perform in their absence. They grasp that weak leaders want to be needed while real leaders want to be succeeded. Thus, they create the conditions for their team to learn, grow and contribute at higher levels and gain the incredible satisfaction that comes from taking others with them rather than running the race alone.

These five principles have been around for ages. In fact, by reading just one book you can find many examples of the principles explained in detail: those who did each well and those who failed with the resulting consequences. And to let you in on a secret, every principle presented in all my leadership workshops finds their roots in this one book. Unfortunately, this book is no longer found in many schools, government offices or businesses. Critics claim it is offensive, divisive and that innocent citizens should be protected from its influence. This book of course, is the Bible and my holiday wish for you is that if you've become estranged from it that you will rediscover its power. My New Year hope for you is that you will use it as your manual for business and life in 2004 and beyond. Happy Holidays!

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