A LEADER'S GUIDE FOR BUILDING EFFECTIVE RELATIONSHIPS TO IMPROVE PERFORMANCE

CONNECTING

STEVEN D. GOLDSTEIN

Other Books Written By Steven D. Goldstein

Why Are Their Snowblowers in Miami?
Fresh Eyes: Your Secret Weapon to Drive Change

Printed in the United States of America.
First Printing, 2018

www.StevenDGoldstein.com

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Connecting

A Leader's Guide For Building Effective Relationships To Improve Performance

By:
Steven D. Goldstein

Introduction: Connecting

I have learned, practiced in my career, and strongly believe that connecting with your employees and customers is the single most important activity that leaders can practice to improve the performance of their companies. Developing dynamic strategies, however important, does not deliver the anticipated results if either your customers do not engage, or worse, your employees realize that your plans are not solving the underlying problems. Your reaction may be that connecting with your employees and customers is obvious, so why are we talking about a topic like connecting? Sadly, many leaders are not engaged and prefer to live in their offices, having meetings, reviewing data and using other methods for getting informed. Whether you are trying to build a strong and effective team or trying to develop lasting and rewarding relationships with your customers, it's the people around leaders that are the lynchpin to your continued success.

In this ebook, I explain how you can learn and practice the skills necessary to effectively connect and engage. These skills are useful regardless of your title. Whether you are the CEO, VP of Sales or a manager of a department, the stories and related skills in each section enable you to learn skills that you can apply immediately. Like any skill, the key to getting better is to practice.

In Part 1, we explore how leaders can better connect with their teams and individuals, even as early as the interview process. You will learn how to empower your teams to become more accountable, collaborate better, share information and strive to achieve common goals.

In Part 2, we explore how vitally important your understanding of the customer is, and how those insights must be factored into every decision you make. As you will quickly see, we cover a lot of ground in this book, so let's get started. The sooner you learn, the sooner you can start practicing and see results.

Part 1: Connecting With Your Employees

Chapter One: How To Choose The Best Team

One of the most important responsibilities leaders have is to hire great talent. The right people make all the difference for a company's performance. There is clearly a domino effect, great people tend to hire great people. If you strive to hire the best, your direct reports (the folks you hire) will tend to hire similarly. Regardless of what size company you have, great talent top to bottom can be a major competitive differentiator from all of your competitors.

I have always admired Apple's model for hiring sales staff. They look for people who are smart, personable, curious and dedicated to taking care of customers. That did not happen over night nor by accident, and is a reflection of Steve Jobs' values.

I recently purchased the latest iPhone from Apple. Tom, my salesman, was much older than the typical Apple salesperson. We had a problem converting my information from my old phone to the new one, and Tom tried to figure out the problem himself but could not. He walked over to a colleague who gave him a suggestion. While it took some time, he was able to set up my phone.

During this time, he told me he was 64, worked 20 hours per week, received full health benefits for himself and his husband, was given stock options, etc. Tom clearly was very happy and proud to be at Apple. And then he said something that was really interesting. Apple expects their sales people to figure it out. Period. Identifying the right people is essential if you are going to follow that strategy.

Over the years, I have interviewed hundreds of people and have continually fine tuned my process for speaking with candidates. One day, I asked a question which has proven to be a really good indicator for what makes a person tick in the work place. Ever since, I've introduced this question, typically in the middle of an interview.

"In your previous jobs, what drives you to come back to the office after you've had a terrible day at work?"

This singular question reveals much more than you might expect. It will put a spotlight on their character, drive and tenacity. It will show their basic strengths and weaknesses. It will provide invaluable input about how they handle problems -- something every job has. While of course you want to probe their resume, this one question cuts to the chase. You will quickly find out whether this is someone you want in the fox hole with you and your team.

Here are some of the answers that I've come across. The best answer, and the one with the fewest responses, is shown last in this chapter. As you begin asking this question, you will probably see some of the same responses. My advice is to wait to hire the person who gives you one of these answers:

"The desire to do my best."

This is an answer you will hear a lot. While this is not a bad response, the candidate appears unwilling to go above and beyond to solve their problems. They are essentially playing not to lose.

As a leader, understand that your biggest secret weapon is your team. Employees who are not engaged are unlikely to question why they had a bad day. Was it their fault, a co-workers, or something else? Without knowing the cause, tomorrow is likely to be the same as today.

"The hope that tomorrow is better."

This was an answer that gets fewer responses than the first. It may show a great attitude, or it might simply be wishful thinking.

The problem with this response is that this employee probably expects his or her environment and coworkers to change. Each employee needs to own the ingredients for creating work satisfaction.

"The need to figure out what went wrong and change my strategy and approach."

Bingo! To me, this is the ultimate indicator that the employee is right for the job. This applicant wants to approach situations with fresh eyes to figure out what the problem is and hopefully implement an action plan. Engaged employees face their problems head-on, work collaboratively with members of their team and create more solutions. They don't accept things as they are and are constantly seeing ways to improve and drive change in their departments and companies.

The next time you are interviewing a candidate for an open position in your company, consider ending the interview with this question. As you will see, some candidates you thought might be right for the role may seem a little flat now. Meanwhile, if all goes well with the basic interview and the candidate gives the right answer to this question, your next question will probably be, "when can you start?”

Chapter Two: The Power of EQ

Picture this: you have an exceptional employee who has proven herself time and time again. She shows an outstanding work ethic, meets all deadlines, and rarely uses PTO. You expect great things from her and she always delivers. Then, out of the blue, she announces her resignation. Clearly surprised, you speak with the employees who worked closely with her and learn that none of them are surprised. Where is the disconnect?

You learned that she had felt very overworked, had a high stress level, and was genuinely unhappy with her position for several months. Everyone who worked with her knew this, but you did not. Imagine you had been more engaged, were more aware of her concerns and made a few changes. This emotional intelligence or emotional quotient (EQ) might have allowed you to notice her unhappiness much sooner—and you might have been able to retain her in the company.

There's a reason why EQ is a necessity for leaders. It helps those who manage employees assess and react to real-world scenarios in which intelligence alone is not sufficient. While IQ may have helped you climb the ladder, EQ will help you perform at the top of your game.

If you still don't think EQ has a place in the business world, here are four real-world scenarios in which EQ helped contribute to a better solution.

Learn How to Tell the Difference Between Driving to Succeed, or Just Raw Ambition.

A few years ago, I hired two employees at the same time for parallel positions, Robert and Chad. Robert exemplified ambition like very few other members of our company. Chad, on the other hand, seemed a bit more measured and reserved. Yet from the beginning, I had a feeling that Chad was going to make it before Robert did.

Fast forward ten-months, Robert's ambition was simply a means to build his resume, and he jumped at the sign of another opportunity. In fact, he quit to work for a competitor. Chad on the other hand really engaged and became a key leader in his department. He was not flashy and did not seek the limelight, but his results were always in the top 15% of the company. Chad stayed with the company for years, and proved to be one of the most valuable and leaders we hired and has grown along with the company.

The takeaway from this story is that some employees may have deceiving exteriors and as the leader, you need to exercise your EQ to ferret out who will best fit in your company. Some may have difficulty expressing their willingness, ability and desire to drive change. Alternatively, those who demonstrate great ambition may not actually be able to do the job. It's up to you as the leader to choose the right people for your team.

Get Out of Your Office and Spend Time with Your Employees.

As I explained in the beginning of this chapter, some employees will look determined and ready to take on new challenges, but they are actually at wit's end. I've seen this happen many times throughout my career and more times than not, it's the leader's fault.

Get out of your office and visit with your people, wherever they are located. You can easily walk down and meet with them at headquarters. And you also have to visit them in stores, factories, warehouses, call centers and anywhere else your people are located.   You will learn an enormous amount about your business, while at the same time, really getting to know them. This is a great way to exercise your EQ – and they will love it.

Use More Common Sense.

Sometimes, common sense is all you need to help your team. Unfortunately, this tends to be a precious commodity in today's business world. Instead of logic and common sense, leaders tend to focus on reports, losing the "touch" of what is really going on in the business.

A great example of this is what led to the title of my book "Why Are There Snowblowers In Miami?" When I was an executive at Sears, a "broken" system ended up sending Snowblowers to Miami, every year for 30 years -- a city that never gets snow! I stumbled upon this is a random visit to the store -- but where were all of the leaders who saw these items being shipped and subsequently returned annually for 30 years? This was not an IQ problem.

Controlling your Own Stress Makes it Easier on Everyone.

It's not easy being the leader. Whether you're in the c-suite or you're building a business from scratch, the pressure is real and unrelenting. Some leaders choose to let this pressure affect them.

This happened to Bernadette, who founded and ran a web development company. She let the stress of her role affect her so much that her employees were afraid to approach her with news of any kind for fear of her screaming at them. Of course, this lack of communication prevented Bernadette from being made aware of important issues, which could have been resolved rather than causing crises. I coached to learn how to open up, be less of a loner and realize that her team could help. She had very low EQ, and once she realized it, she committed herself to be more self-aware.

While your IQ probably had a lot to do with getting your current position, you need to tap into your EQ and develop it to grow to ensure you can be an even more effective leader.

Chapter Three: Empowering and Engaging Your Team

By far the biggest secret weapon you have—or that any company has—is your own employees. Your employees are your most valuable assets, but you have to be proactive to find and unleash the hidden power inherent in your organization. To begin this process, you need to get the lay of the land—to understand the perspectives of both your leaders and employees, and what their relationship is to each other.

First, I strongly believe that most employees are good people who want to do a good job. Having spent over thirty-five years working in and leading companies as well as advising them, I think I have developed a pretty accurate sense of the dynamics at play in organizations. Employees spend more time at work than anywhere else in their twenty-four-hour day, and they would like to feel productive and satisfied, and hopefully look forward to coming back tomorrow. They are looking for someone to engage with them, to make their job as interesting and meaningful as possible and to allow them to contribute and grow—in addition to earning a salary (which is the primary reason it is called work and not vacation).

Second, it is also important to understand and appreciate that there is no real pact or bargain today between employees and employers; they each serve at the whim of the other. If the employee finds a better job, he's gone. If the company decides to restructure the organization, then twenty (or two hundred) folks are let go. This is quite a different framework from the "I do a good job, have a career with the company, and stay until retirement" ideology that typified American business after World War II. While this fundamental concept no longer exists, employers are still looking for great employees to fully dedicate themselves to the company, and employees are looking for organizations that will appreciate their skills, effort, and talent. Employees witness companies sending jobs offshore, outsourcing entire departments, reducing hours to avoid providing health-care benefits, and implementing other cost measures designed to improve profitability. From the employers' vantage point, employees are more concerned about themselves than their work, want to earn more than they deserve, and will leave at a moment's notice if another better position comes along.

Third, it is a safe bet that most of your employees are not very engaged (regardless of their level in the company)—or at least not as engaged as they could be. Because of things that you or others may have done and said in the past, many of your employees could well believe that you think of them merely as a cost—in much the same way that you view office space, computers, and trucks. In other words, all other things being equal, you should assume the situation is broken. This idea is counterintuitive to most leaders; as a rule we don't want to go looking for trouble and prefer to take the position that unless we see obvious problems, everything is fine. However, just because you don't see smoke pouring out of the second-story windows doesn't mean there's not a fire in the basement. Your best course of action is to start with the notion that there is a lot of work to be done. It is incumbent on you, as the leader— and your leadership team—to engage your people.

There are several ways to begin to unleash the power of your team, but it begins with looking at things with fresh eyes, and committing to engaging. Engagement needs to start at the top, and it will flow downward throughout the organization, like water; after all, water cannot flow up. Each of the Five Principles of Engagement must be employed from the top down, and connecting is one of these. Senior leaders need to create an atmosphere of involvement and trust along with designing processes that encourage two-way communication. Leaders connect by interacting authentically with employees, not by dictating to them. As a leader, you need to become a bit more human—by not being afraid to show emotions, by revealing your true personality, and by stepping out of the stereotypical role of "boss." All of us have been inculcated not to do this—we are trained not to reveal our true selves in the business world; so for many leaders, this will not come naturally.

I have always considered myself lucky that I truly enjoy talking to people—everyone, everywhere, and all the time. I find it very motivating and interesting to see how other people think, whether I'm waiting in line to get a coffee or I am sitting next to someone on an airplane or in the company cafeteria. However, you don't have to be born gregarious; engaging with people is something you can train yourself to do.

Principles versus Rules

Rules become the rails that the company train rides on. Most large organizations have rules—in some cases hundreds or thousands of them. They accumulate over the course of years and each is created for a very specific reason at the time; that is, somewhere along the line a new problem develops or an issue arises, and in fixing the problem, someone creates a new rule. Of course, the purpose of rules is to make sure there are repeatable, reliable processes and no mistakes—a noble goal. Rules are often a major barrier to engagement, and there can be unintended consequences of rules. Rules force employees to think in a binary way: they either authorize an MRI procedure or decide it's not warranted; allow the passenger to board the plane now, or make her wait; authorize a refund, or tell the customer why it will not happen; and so on.

The problem is that while rules are black and white, the real world is gray. Employees, coworkers, customers, and leaders are all operating in the "gray" world, not within the sterile, inflexible dimension of rules. Not surprisingly, many leaders who favor the traditional command-and-control business culture find it difficult to imagine a world with fewer rules; to them, fewer rules mean a loss of control. Yet as the world moves faster and information is omnipresent, rules—which tend to be static—very often cannot keep up with the demands of the market and the needs of your customers. The consequence of rigid rules is that they often place well-intentioned employees (and in turn customers) in an unnecessary conflict, simply because they are required to adhere to those rules—some of which may have been instituted ten years ago.

Principles are different from rules. They speak to values, to what is really important in a given situation. They provide structure, guidelines, and parameters. They define the boundaries relating to what is permissible and what is not, but they also provide leeway, so that individual judgment can be used in the moment—allowing for the best possible outcome given a specific set of circumstances. Principles also require a level of trust between leaders and employees. They say: "We've trained you, given you all the necessary tools, and explained what's important—and we expect you to operate within this framework and use your best judgment." That, in and of itself, requires a leader to relinquish some control—something that many leaders are not comfortable doing. And the employee—once he is given the leeway—has the responsibility to not behave like a robot; he needs to think, assess, act, and make a decision that works for both the company and the customer.

Most of us recognize and appreciate when people are acting according to principles rather than strict rules. For instance, a few years ago I took a trip to Asia and about a week before I was scheduled to leave I was told that I needed to take a CAT scan test before I went. The scheduling desk gave me a Saturday morning appointment, and I was grateful they could accommodate me on such short notice. However, because they had rushed to fit me in, they missed the note on my chart that I am allergic to iodine. Being allergic to iodine, I needed to be premeditated in order to safely take the test (which they forgot to tell me). I was sent home and told to contact my doctor so that he could prescribe the medication that would allow me to proceed with the test. Unfortunately, they would not let me reschedule the test until twenty-four hours after I had taken the medication, and it seemed unlikely I would be able to schedule it before my departure, putting my trip at risk. Luckily the supervisor, Mabel, stepped in and said to me, "I will take care of this for you—here is my personal phone number. You call me after you've taken the pills, and I will get you in ASAP. I will personally make sure that you can have this properly checked out so you can go and enjoy your trip."

Mabel squeezed me in on Tuesday. While I was walking into the test room, a person in the waiting room was complaining that her appointment was delayed (I assume because of me), but Mabel ignored her. She instinctually knew to make an exception—because I was about to leave the country for three weeks and really needed this test— and she probably felt comfortable enough that her seniors would support her decision if it were questioned. This type of interaction creates a lasting bond between a customer and a company when done right. Mabel operated on the principle of taking care of a patient rather than blindly following the rules.

Large organizations have the most rules, both the written or "official" ones and the ones that inexplicably come into existence all on their own. When I ask people about why they are following what appears to be a strange rule, most of the time no one can explain why the rule exists or what condition occurred to initiate the rule. Sometimes people laugh at the absurdity of some of these rules, but it actually isn't funny, and it's also not good business.

Here is a good example of how an arbitrary rule can get started. A call center company, tracking its results very carefully, determined that its agents were staying on a call with customers for an average of three and a half minutes, which they thought was way too long. Rather than determine why this was happening, the top brass instructed managers to drive down the time each agent was on a call. One manager got so excited by this, he proudly told his leadership team that his calls averaged less than one minute! Of course, that manager's customers had to call the company back because their problem was not properly addressed, which made them increasingly unhappy.

The cumulative effect of having rigid rules is similar to what would happen if the pilot and the brakeman on a bobsled team switched positions. Watching a bobsled race always amazes me, because so much happens within a very short period of time, in a highly organized way. Basically, four big guys all jump into an aerodynamically designed sled to go down this icy track on a giant mountain. The front guy (the pilot) jumps in first and steers. The next two guys (called pushers because their power is critical in getting a good start) jump in sequentially after the pilot and serve to balance the sled through numerous and treacherous turns. The last guy who jumps into the sled is the brakeman. His job is to modulate their speed so that they can go as fast as possible without flying off the track. With the sled reaching speeds of eighty miles an hour, the team is all about flexibility and finesse—principles, not rules. All four riders need to be fully in sync—reacting to one another and making instantaneous decisions with their body movements. Everyone has a job on the sled; and to win the race, everyone needs to operate at peak performance.

In many companies, following the rules is a little like putting the brakeman in the front of the sled, instead of the pilot. The brakeman is only interested in not crashing; after all, that's his job. Speed is not as important. And so what happens in these companies is that there is no momentum, no energy, no action—just brakes.

Simply put, the problem with rules is they are fixed and cannot cover every situation. Circumstances change; what might have been a great rule eight years ago might be ridiculous today. Management prefers predictability and conformance (both are related to control). They don't want people to take initiative for fear they might do something wrong. Theoretically, rules are supposed to limit the damage that can be done. But they also limit the good that can be done. How might employees and customers interact if employees were allowed to think and exercise their own judgment within some basic parameters?

Because they utilize an open system, principles afford employees the latitude to do what they think is right. They provide room to move, room to make the sale. Principles require more thought to create than rules; however, if you train employees well, using a structure of principles to follow, the upside is huge for the owner. Moreover, the employees will feel more empowered, have more fun, and in some cases may make more money for themselves as well.

Here is a really good example to demonstrate this point. When I ran the Sears credit card business, we used to get millions of customer service calls each year. Many of these calls were from customers disputing charges that appeared on their monthly billing statements. In some cases, our agents were able to resolve the question immediately, while in other cases, further research was required. I had seen a report that a substantial percentage of these cases requiring research were for amounts under fifty dollars, and I wondered what our fully loaded cost was to investigate these questions. The analysis showed that it cost us about thirty-five dollars per inquiry, which I felt was pretty expensive for us. Because we were processing enormous volumes of these transactions, I suggested to my team that going forward, if the dispute was for twenty-five dollars or less, we would offer a credit to the customer on the spot and eliminate the entire research process—making the customer happy and saving us ten dollars per inquiry. Seems simple, right?

But a funny thing happened. Programmed by years of rules and procedures, employees either thought we were giving away something to customers they did not deserve, or felt strongly we should not institute this policy because customers would invariably "take advantage of us." How and when did this thought process begin? Why did they assume our customers would suddenly devise a plan to rip us off? Our employees had been following the rules for so long that breaking them actually made them suspicious of their customers. We implemented the change, made our customers very happy, and actually made more money in this department. I firmly believe that in an organization that had been led with principles instead of rules, the employees would not have reacted this way and might well have come up with the idea themselves.

Most companies already have everything they need to do it right; they just don't realize it. The key is to inspire, not to command—and to treat employees like adults. If they don't do well, train them better or replace them, but don't treat them like children. Allow them the space to show initiative.

Here are a few approaches I use that work well:

- Don't give orders to your leaders. Make sure they are totally informed about what is going on and ask them questions about how they plan to address particular issues. Engage with them rather than telling them, especially your leaders at the higher levels. After all, these are people to whom you've entrusted tremendous responsibility; so let them figure out how do their jobs.

- Make sure employees know the rules are going to be changing and that many rules will be replaced with principles—but that it is going to happen over time. This change must be gradual, because you do not want to cause an earthquake within your operation.

- Treat each situation you encounter as an opportunity to change a rule into a principle. This "bite-sized" approach limits your risk, and it also makes it easier for employees to begin to understand that change is on the way, and it's good.

- After you have been working on this for a few months, ask your middle- and lower-level leaders to identify some rules that can be changed—and ask them how they would change those rules into principles. You will be amazed at how quickly they will grasp these concepts and help you lead the charge.

The Importance of Challenging the Status Quo.

A great example of this is the great Volkswagen controversy of 2015. It was discovered that eleven million diesel vehicles sold in the United States and Europe contained a so-called software-enabled “defeat device,” which effectively lowered vehicle emissions for regulatory testing purposes. Basically it was a technique to deceive the regulatory agencies and their customers by falsely lowering the levels of pollutants that were actually being emitted, but only during emissions tests. The United States Environmental Protection Agency issued a notice on September 18, 2015, that the car marker had violated the Clean Air Act.

Two days later, VW admitted the deception. The stock dropped 20 percent and declined another 17 percent the next day. On September 23, CEO Martin Winterkorn resigned (which was followed by another six executives resigning in the ensuing days). Four weeks after the initial scandal broke, Volkswagen, for the first time in its history, offered a thirty-day amnesty program to all employees (excluding management) if they would come forward and tell what they knew about how this happened. Obviously this investigation came way too late. The crisis continued to unfold for many months—and will continue for years to come—with potential civil and criminal lawsuits, customers wondering what will happen to their cars, and leaders and employees wondering what the next moves will be.

Like so many people, I could not help wonder how this could have happened to one of the largest and most respected global automakers. What level of disconnect within Volkswagen could have caused such an outcome? What kind of management processes allowed this to occur? What caused employees and leaders to be silent when they knew this was wrong? Why hadn’t the board of directors been aware of this situation so they could proactively deal with it?

It is pure speculation of course, and it is unclear exactly who was culpable, but I have seen similar crisis-level situations before, and here is a plausible scenario.

The company and its CEO announced ten years ago that they would be launching a new line of diesel cars that would be extremely fuel efficient, green, and would perform better than their current models. Some factions within VW intended to purchase Mercedes' BlueTEC system for reducing pollution, but other factions rejected that and preferred to develop their own system. A substantial amount—perhaps billions of euros—would be invested to develop the technology and manufacturing facilities built to produce these cars.

Along the way, various delays occurred in developing the new technology, but the launch date was never revised because the launch was "carved in stone." Downstream leaders were afraid to tell their bosses there were issues. (VW leadership has been well known for a command-and-control style "on steroids.") So some of the engineers developed a software program, the sole purpose of which was to allow the car to falsely pass the test for the government regulatory certification. This meant the cars that were sold were neither in compliance with the law nor did they have the gas mileage performance that had been marketed to customers. I can't help thinking that the CEO and/or the senior leadership must have fostered an atmosphere of fear that helped produce this disaster—that some or many employees were afraid to tell those at the top about the development of the software—or, if senior people did know, that employees were afraid to tell them it was a bad idea. Or—and this is the crux of it—that too few employees said, "Wait—what are we doing here? Why are we doing this? We need to pull the fire alarm lever!"

It will take years for Volkswagen to dig itself out of this situation—a situation that could have been entirely prevented if leaders had felt comfortable enough to raise their hands and say there was a problem. A New York Times article in December 2015 reported that a former VW employee, Mr. Arndt Ellinghorst, who is now an automotive industry analyst at an investment advisory firm, decided not to stay at Volkswagen, partly due to its management style. "VW had this special culture," he said. "It was like North Korea without labor camps," he added, quoting a famous description of the company published in Der Spiegel magazine. "You have to obey."

Of course this is an extreme example. There are many different degrees of this kind of sheeplike, nonquestioning behavior. Not all of them result in real harm to the corporation, as in the Volkswagen instance. When I spoke with Andrew Florance of CoStar, he told me another kind of story that illustrates how important it is to have engaged employees—ones who question what they are doing—and what can happen if they don't.

"There was one company we acquired that gave an annual customer event, a dinner," Florance said, "where they would have their biggest customers come together. So we're having this dinner, and the person responsible for running the conference, comes up to me and says 'We have an emergency.'

"'What is it?' I asked.

"'Well, I made it clear that the hotel was not supposed to serve key lime pie,' she says, 'and the waiters are putting key lime pie down.'

"So I assume someone is allergic to key lime pie, but she's not sure who. And I say 'So what are you going to do?'

"She says, 'I'm going to tell the waiters to start pulling it up right away.'

"So I say, 'Okay. As long as you do that before this guy takes the first bite.'

"So she dashes off, and the waiters start pulling pie. But I'm thinking to myself, But wouldn't this guy look at the key lime pie and know it was key lime pie? He's like, fifty years old, couldn't he figure this out? What are we talking about here?

"I went over to her and said, 'Wait a minute, is someone allergic to it?' And she answered, 'No no, Judy B______ said she hates key lime pie and never wants key lime pie served at the conference.'

"So as I'm watching the waiters running around taking pie off people's tables, I say to her, 'Judy left the company ten years ago, she died five years ago—she's not eating the pie!'"

You see it again and again: Something got set in motion by someone who had the ability to understand what's happening, and why it's happening, and then it goes into perpetual motion—it becomes a rule without the people executing it questioning why it happens or whether it made any sense for it to happen in the first place. If the conference woman had been engaged, operating with fresh eyes, she would not have blindly followed the "no key lime pie" rule for ten years. There would have been some kind of discussion (i.e., why is key lime pie not a good dessert to serve at the conference?). Obviously, the banning of a dessert is of minor consequence, but what happened at Volkswagen was anything but minor. When people don't question rules or policies, there can be serious and negative results.

There is always an answer to why something happens; people typically don't act out of randomness. Something caused an action or rule to be set in motion, but so often it is blindly accepted and followed. It gets locked in, and it can do a lot of damage when it is not challenged.

Shaking Things Up.

One way to get your employees to engage is to do something unusual to get them to become more aware of what they are doing and how it affects the organization as a whole. (Fresh eyes are not always so easy to manifest; sometimes people need help). I was reminded of this when I spoke with Claes Landberg, who is general manager of YOTEL in New York City and someone with over twenty years of management experience. YOTEL is a fairly new hotel concept that provides a cool, affordable luxury hotel experience. He was telling me about how he gets a team energized, how to get the individual members of the team to engage or reengage—involving them, and letting them have a say.

"I will never forget this. I was just at the beginning of my career, and I was sitting having lunch in the little restaurant I was managing in Stockholm. My dishwasher was talking about what a failure he was in life, because he was only a dishwasher. And that was tough for me, hearing him talk like that, you know, someone that works for you. It was a new environment for me; I think I was nineteen or something like that at the time. It kept bothering me, eating away at me. I couldn't think about anything else the whole night. So the next day I decided to do an experiment. It was an experiment that I think worked very well, even though I would do it very differently today.

“I decided to have him not do the dishes for this lunch. Now, this was a seventy-seat restaurant; we did about 250– 300 covers per lunch, with 202 plates available. So if no one washes the dishes, guess what’s happens? So, after breakfast service, I told the dishwasher, ‘Just sit here. I don’t want you to touch the dishes for the entire lunch service.’ He looked at me like I had three heads, but he did what I said.

“And then we start lunch, the restaurant fills up very quickly, the second seating starts, the pile of clean plates keeps going down, and finally the last ten clean plates are taken out of the kitchen, and I hear the chef and everybody start yelling ‘Hey I need plates, I need plates!’

“And then I just take everybody into the kitchen, and I say to them, ‘Okay everybody stop what you are doing.’

“‘I’m very sorry to say but we are closing down the restaurant. Unfortunately, we cannot stay open because we don’t have plates to serve our guests. What does that mean? That means that none of you have jobs anymore. You don’t have a paycheck to put food on the table for your families. I’m sorry that Christmas is going to be a little bit difficult for you this year.’

“And everyone starts saying, ‘What are you talking about?’ And at that point I turn to the dishwasher, and I tell him, ‘This is how important you are. Everyone in this room—and their families—depend on you doing your job and doing it very well.’

“Of course,” Landberg continued, “this was a drastic way to prove a point, but I’ve never seen anyone wash the dishes the way he did after that. Later my crew asked me, ‘Why didn’t you let us in on the deal? You scared the s**t out of us.’ But of course that would have lessened the impact. And really after that we always had that openness— we worked together. Yes, we were a small team. But we understood everything one of us did affected everyone.”

I used a “shaking things up” method of my own on one occasion, and while we got really good results, I must admit it was quite a challenge to implement. A medium-sized company I had invested in (and was on the board of) was performing well, though not as well as we believed they were capable of. After spending a few days at an offsite meeting with the CEO and the reasonably strong leadership team, I came up with the idea that they would all switch jobs with one another for one week. That way all of them could approach their new roles with fresh eyes, and might be able to see more clearly what else could be done in that role.

After lots of discussion, they agreed to do this—although of course we had to set ground rules, agree on protocols, etc. What happened was that, after we navigated all the interpersonal roadblocks (people not wanting to insult each other by pointing out things that hadn’t been done right in the past, etc.), many good suggestions were made that were developed and implemented into long-term projects. And all the leaders gained a better sense of the issues their colleagues were facing, which led to a higher level of teamwork going forward. Not only does this method engender company-wide fresh eyes, it also serves to connect leaders to each other in a new way.

Getting People To Ask Questions.

The truth is that most people are afraid to ask questions— whether from years of conditioning within a company or plain old human nature. Whatever natural curiosity they had as children tends to get discouraged in most large organizations. Leaders assume following the status quo is the right way to go and are not interested in trying to challenge anything, especially if it seems on the surface to be going along just fine. And the lower-level employees just try to do what’s asked of them and stay out of trouble—believing that people who ask questions may be sticking their neck out.

Obviously, getting people to start asking questions— getting them to use fresh eyes and then act on that new perspective—requires effort and energy. It means changing what may have been part of a process for years. Change is very hard. It actually means choosing the path of resistance, instead of the path of least resistance. But when people get into the habit and know they won't get their heads chopped off for asking questions, that in fact their questions will be welcomed, everything gets better.

The best way to teach is by example. Buddha and every other great leader throughout history taught by showing or doing, not by telling. When your people see you, the leader, asking questions (i.e., questions about how and why things are done, not questions regarding people's individual intentions and/or productivity), they will begin to feel comfortable answering your questions, and they will start asking similar questions with their folks. And those folks, in turn, will start to realize that challenging things and offering information about what is really going on in their department is something that is encouraged. When you are willing to admit in front of everybody that you don't know a particular answer, and you are the boss, then that makes others understand that they also can admit they don't know. This enables free flowing information, which is essential to the health and productivity of your organization.

This sounds pretty simple doesn't it? So why does this reticence, this reluctance to ask questions, occur so often? Why is it so hard for leaders to know what's going on at the lower levels of their companies? The main reason is that leaders are fundamentally not interacting well with their employees.

Obviously most leaders don't promote a closed-door policy or a bad environment. They just don't actively promote the opposite. But the absence of a positive message is still a message, just as making no decision is actually making an important decision—a decision to do nothing. The process of questioning is actually hard—and it is a process. There are no simple approaches here to reset what has been years in the making.

When I interviewed Denis Picard, a managing director who specializes in technology and operations with Alvarez & Marsal's Business Performance Improvement in New York, he told me a story that illustrates what can happen when people don't ask questions.

"We had a client in Boston," said Picard, "a communications technology manufacturer, rapidly growing, who needed to put in a new ERP [enterprise resource planning] system. As I'm sure you know, ERP systems have a high risk of failure, and if you don't have senior management support you cannot succeed.

"This Boston client had picked a system, configured the system, converted the data, and they were ready to go. Then the CFO, who is a friend of mine, called me and asked me if I would come take a look. He said they were supposed to go live, but he wasn't feeling good about what was happening.

"So I spent some time looking into it and found out that the implementation has stalled. They were supposed to go live maybe in a month or two, but things were at a standstill. I had a conversation with the CIO, who was the project leader, and I asked him what the problem was.

"'We lack senior management support,' he told me. 'Wow,' I said. 'That sounds pretty serious. Why do you say that?' 'Because the CFO won't help us,' was his answer. And I thought, That's interesting because the CFO was the one who asked me to check into this. What's he doing wrong?

"So we kept talking about this," said Picard, "and it turns out they couldn't complete the final test and go live unless they bought a special printer—because they had to do some kind of labels that go on circuit boards or something like that—but in any case it was a very special printer, and it was going to cost $12,000." When I asked Picard what the CFO had said when the CIO informed him of this, he told me the CIO had hesitated and then replied, "Well we haven't really asked him."

"Why not?" Picard had wanted to know. "Why wouldn't you have asked him?"

"He's going to say no," the CIO said. "Because it's very expensive. I can't ask him; it would be really bad for my career."

Picard went to the CFO to report back and told him, tongue in cheek, "Well, I found out that you are the problem."

The CFO looked at him kind of quizzically and said, “What are you talking about?”

“My understanding,” said Picard, “is that you will not approve a $12,000 printer that you don’t know anything about, and that’s going to cause the project to be delayed.”

The CFO was nonplussed. Absurdly enough, the project was costing about $5 million, and a $12,000 printer was holding it hostage. Of course in the end they bought the printer and finished the project.

If you engage your employees, they will not be afraid to come to you and tell you what is really happening. Their natural curiosity will come back, and they will start questioning things. However, this is a process that requires constant fine-tuning. For instance, at one company where I am involved, I offered up the idea of launching a company newsletter, so everyone would feel more connected. They liked the idea, and a small team put together the first newsletter, which was great and professionally done. Then, a couple of weeks later in a meeting, I asked everyone what their folks thought about the newsletter, and someone piped up with, “Well, the guys in our department didn’t get mentioned, so they are pissed off.” So I told him to go back and tell the team in that department to show everyone what they were made of and try to win the contest to name the newsletter. The point is, suggesting the newsletter was only step one; I asked what people thought about it, which provoked a conversation, concern, and subsequent action. It never stops, and the more everyone speaks up, the better it is.

When Alan Mulally was recruited from Boeing to become the CEO of Ford Motor Company, the company was experiencing serious financial difficulties—and this was prior to the recession. Historically, Ford had been a very siloed, highly bureaucratized organization that was still heavily controlled by the heirs of Henry Ford. Business reviews were totally predictable and no one ever discussed bad news. All presentations were positive—but if everything was going so well why was the company in trouble?

At review sessions, Mulally kept asking his leaders to identify and highlight issues in their presentations with red (problems), yellow (caution), and green (good)—yet all the information was coded as either green or yellow. Finally at one meeting, an executive named Mark Fields shocked everyone by presenting a chart with a red box, indicating a technical problem with the Ford Edge—a problem that would result in an expensive delay. Reportedly, Mulally started clapping; he thanked Fields for raising the issue and then suggested how a few of the leaders in that meeting could assist. In Fortune magazine, Mulally is quoted as saying "Communicate, communicate, communicate. Everyone has to know the plan, its status, and areas that need special attention." Mulally did a great job reinvigorating Ford, without requiring federal government assistance from the TARP program or taking the company through the bankruptcy process as did General Motors and Chrysler. Last year, Mark Fields was named CEO of Ford, and I do not think it was an accident that someone like him was able to move into that role.

Getting your employees to ask questions starts with you letting your hair down. Start a dialog. Begin with engagement.

Of course, there are some people who are born introverts; interacting with people does not come easily to them. They are afraid of saying the wrong thing, of offending someone, of looking stupid if they don't know the answer to something. There are many different methods to encourage people to open up so you can get to the nitty-gritty of what's going on. But you can't do this superficially. If you are not truly engaged in this process, then it will not work. So how do you begin to practice this? If this does not come naturally to you, here's a list of things you might do. Even if you are someone who is not comfortable talking to lots of people and asking questions, choose one or two that suit you the best, ones that feel the most natural to you. And then just start engaging.

Here are some easy and painless ways to begin:
Have a conversation with your assistant and ask him how things are going. If you have never really done this before, with someone you know, you will find out immediately that there are things he will tell you that you never knew—and will want to know.

Ask your assistant if he can suggest a few individuals he thinks would be willing to be open with you. Then you can reach out to them and arrange to meet with them individually. These chats do not have to be more than fifteen or twenty minutes.

Make yourself talk to one new person every day—no matter who it is. Choose someone you would not normally talk to. At the end of the week, ask yourself, “Did I do this? Did I engage with someone new?” Believe it or not this will be fun, and you will almost always learn something that is beneficial. Once you realize it’s not a waste of time, you will naturally do more of it. Like the Hot Button principle, starting small is the way you begin anything new, whether it’s learning the saxophone, training for a marathon, or getting your people to ask questions.

Convene a small group of employees into a conference room in their department (not your conference room) and say something like this: “I just wanted to come down and visit with you to see how you are all doing. I’d like to hear from you about what’s working in your department, what’s not—where you think we can improve, etc. I will probably take some notes to make sure I can address the items you bring up.” Go around the table and ask them to tell you their name and what their job is. Usually before people finish introducing themselves, someone will make a comment that sparks a conversation among the group members, and we’re off to the races. Before you know it, an hour is up and you have pages of notes.

Connecting Through Storytelling.

It’s no secret that one of the most effective ways to communicate an idea to people is through stories. People have been doing this since the beginning of time. Storytelling is one of the easiest methods of connecting to another human being. You can get your point across in a way that they can relate to and remember. The most successful people are often excellent storytellers.

In his book Tell to Win, Peter Guber—chairman and CEO of Mandalay Entertainment and producer of movies such as Batman, The Witches of Eastwick, and Flashdance—talks about the incredible power of storytelling. He took a group of ten friends on a five-day serious rafting trip on the Colorado River in the Grand Canyon. These friends were all-stars in their respective fields, and were all supremely confident individuals. For the first couple of days, they were all horsing around, and Guber knew they were not taking the very real danger in front of them seriously enough. So far they had all been pretty much ignoring the instructions of the expedition guides, and he felt if they didn't start taking things seriously, there was a real danger someone could die.

As they came ashore the third day, they could hear what sounded like a train roaring by. But of course it was not a train but the "class 10 rapid" that was just around the bend. Guber took the group up the canyon to look at the thirty-seven-foot drop—the waterfall they were going to go over the next day. That made everyone nervous enough to be receptive to one of Peter Guber's stories. It was a Joseph Campbell–type tale that took place in ancient Egypt, and was about a hunting party traveling on the Nile. The story was about a king, a crocodile spirit, and learning to respect the perils of crossing the river. Every one of the previously joking members of the rafting group paid rapt attention during the telling of the tale. After hearing the story, they got it: It was time to stop messing around. They needed to concentrate on navigating the river. And they all listened to his rules about rafting much more than if he hadn't told the story.

This technique is an essential one if you want to be an effective leader. If I just give you the instructions without the story, even very simple instructions, they often go in one ear and out the other. But wrapped in the import of a vivid narrative, it becomes an impactful message. You've got to draw people in when you want to get your point across. Our mothers and fathers told us stories when we were kids (I can still remember many of those stories). Most of us still respond to stories more than any other kind of communication.

When I was at Citibank, I attended a four-day training seminar. These were backbreaking meetings, one after another; and toward the end of the seminar our brains were ready to explode. On the next to the last day, they said to us, "We're going to have a project for you to work on after dinner." So we had dinner, and of course everyone drank wine during dinner so that by the end of it some people were already drunk. Everyone else was just fried from the meetings. And then the leaders broke us up into groups of ten people each and gave each of us one piece of paper, printed double-sided. On it was a story that I recall pretty vividly.

You are on the plane, going cross-country, and something happens en route, and you wind up flying across Northern Canada. The plane crashes, and a lot of passengers die in the crash. You are the ten people who have survived. Included on the sheet was a very short list of items that are available to you. No one has proper clothing for the Arctic. There is no food left on the plane because it had gone past the dinner service. You are left with a compass, a can opener, a broken mirror, a shoehorn, and other random items like that. There are no communications or emergency radio available, you are in the middle of nowhere, and you don't know where you are; there is no map. Everything, all the instrumentation in the plane is dead, no battery or anything.

Together the team had to make a decision—and there was only one decision to make: Do we wait for help to come, or do we leave and look for help? The only rule was that the team decision had to be unanimous. We started the exercise at 10 p.m. And we went at it until 4 a.m. In the beginning of the process, everyone was making jokes and goofing around, but as the time wore on, our discussions got more serious, and heated.

Among our ten-person group, factions evolved; four different approaches were taking form, but we were clearly spinning our wheels. Ultimately I said, "Why don't we see which of us knows anything about this subject? (I grew up in the Bronx and don't know anything about the Arctic or camping.) I asked the group, "Does anyone know about navigation or extreme cold?" Several people started talking about their own experiences: how you prevent hypothermia, etc. After several hours we, as a group, decided we could go into the fuselage of the plane and block off the holes damaged in the crash, use the luggage to keep out the wind and animals, use a mirror to melt snow so we could make water, etc.

Ultimately, we decided to wait for help. There were ten teams; seven decided to go, three decided to wait. It turned out the correct answer for this exercise was to wait, the idea being that airline and rescue services knew the plane was down, and they would ping the transponder and eventually find it. If you left, you would probably die, either from animal attacks, by freezing to death, or whatever.

So what was the purpose of this story, this exercise? Because the decision needed to be unanimous, it was about us working together as a team: Someone had to lead, someone had to step up. Someone else had to adjudicate. It was storytelling used as team practice, and it was quite effective.

I use stories all the time to motivate people. For example this one: In 1978, I was twenty-seven years old, and I got promoted to CFO of a business for Citicorp. It was a big leap for me at the time, and I moved to Los Angeles for the job. We bought a company that had to be carved out of a larger company, and we had one year to accomplish this. And it didn't go well. In fact, it was a disaster. Everything was bad. And the senior vice president who oversaw this transaction was a tough Irishman we'll call O'Malley. He was a very tough guy, and as our performance deteriorated, he got increasingly tougher.

O'Malley created a form, and he said to me, "I want you to fill out this form every day and fax it to me." On the form were all the key indicators of the business. He didn't explain it to me. He just told me, "Fill it out and send it to me." All of us in the company were busy bailing water. Everything was broken, and we were doing everything possible trying to fix it. No one even had time to sleep. We didn't know what the hell we were doing. I would give this form to the leadership team and say, "We've got to fill this out so I can give this to O'Malley first thing in the morning."

So my team would consolidate all the numbers, and then my secretary would fax the form to his secretary. O'Malley would call me every morning at eleven o'clock, and he would start asking me questions about the information on the form I had just sent him. I didn't know the answer to any of these questions because I hadn't filled it out. A lot of the information was incorrect, and the people who filled it out didn't give a damn. So, he would curse at me. He would say, "You don't know anything!" After a few days of this, I realized this was stupid. So I called everyone into the conference room and said, "Listen guys, let me explain what happens. Every day at eleven o'clock I get my ass kicked by O'Malley because I can't answer his questions about our form. The numbers are not accurate. So I want you guys to be more careful completing this form, and we are going to meet at 4 p.m. every day before I submit the form to him. I'm going to ask you the same kinds of questions that O'Malley asks me. You need to understand your information and explain it to me, so I will have the answers by the time he calls me at eleven the next day."

And then I said to them, "If you don't do this, you're going to be the ones on the phone with O'Malley at eleven o'clock, and trust me you don't want that to happen." (They looked at me in terror, because from what I told them, they knew O'Malley was a person you did not want to be on the wrong side of). This caused them to do lots of work.

So guess what? Little by little the numbers became more accurate, and we started to figure everything out. The conversations between O'Malley and me started to get better. And then one day he didn't call. I figured he was on vacation, or sick . . . he didn't call the next day or the next day. So finally I called him.

I said, "O'Malley, why haven't you been calling? I miss you."

He said, "I don't need to."

I said, "Why not?"

"I know you are all over it," he said to me.

I told this entire story to the president of a company I was working with a few years ago, who had a similar situation. "You have to be O'Malley," I said. "You have to meet with them every day at 9 a.m., review this daily KPI [key performance indicator] report, and not stop asking questions until they understand that you are serious about addressing these problems and they also understand how to fix them. And then you can stop going over there."

"You're O'Malley," I reiterated at the end.

"I got it," he said.

I tell the O'Malley story whenever I come across a leader who is not pushing his people hard enough. It works every time.

There is an old Native American saying: “Tell me a fact, and I’ll learn it. Tell me a truth, and I’ll believe. But tell me a story, and it will live in my heart forever.” There is really no teaching tool as effective as a good story.

Recognition and Rewards.

I’m not going to address the specific issue of monetary compensation in this book because much has been written about this subject. If you want to attract and retain great people, you need to have a compensation structure and plan that allows you to do just that, with as many bells and whistles as necessary and appropriate to accomplish your goals. For the purpose of this section, I will assume you have done that. However, while that is necessary, it’s not enough.

To really engage your employees, you need to constantly look for ways to recognize and reward them. Many companies have formal recognition programs, such as annual sales meetings where the best salesmen (e.g., the ones who break records) are brought up to the stage and given a trophy in front of all their peers.

I find that informal approaches to recognition are very powerful. Simply thanking a person for doing a great job goes a long way. So does remembering her name, or asking after a family member (a son who broke his leg, a husband who had an operation). Taking a small team out to dinner to celebrate the completion of a tough project has both short-term and long-term value. All these activities humanize you, make you more approachable, and enable people to be more willing to come and speak with you. And here’s the bottom line: People like working at places where leaders are friendly.

* * *

Everything in this chapter boils down to one thing, as simplistic as it sounds: treat people as you would like to be treated. If you just did that, it would go a long way. This may sound easy, but it’s hard for some people in high-level positions to treat people below them as equals. What executives need to understand is that it’s not just about being a good person; it’s also about good business. This is not a prescriptive, formulaic process—it’s more of an altering of your mindset; it's learning to be interested in the people around you—finding out who these people really are, your fellow human beings. This is something that becomes grooved with experience—like a great golf or tennis swing—it's not going to be productive if it's a random occasional event. This takes a real and continual interaction. And, like anything else that requires practice, the more you do it, the easier it gets.

Chapter Four: Setting The Pace For Your Team

Having led and advised companies many companies throughout my career, I noticed that most of them share one trait-- they think big. While no one would argue that this characteristic is essential to drive growth, like most things, the devil is in the details. Thinking big usually leads to complex projects, spending lots of money, and deploying lots of people. The time frame to complete these projects tends to be long, sometimes years, and this fact alone creates problems.

The sheer size and length of these projects makes it difficult for your employees stay motivated and engaged in their work as it is an "all or nothing" proposition. These experiences led me to create "The Quick Win."

Working with a number of venture-backed and private equity funded companies, I saw how these companies adopted an entirely different approach to project management. In essence, the process turns upside down, breaking a huge project into many smaller, manageable pieces.

Deadlines are measured in weeks, allowing teams to successfully achieve their goals. It allows for instant changes in future steps based on observation of what just was completed. It enables employees to actively engage and contribute on a daily basis.

Participating in these small successes will motivate and encourage employees. It also provides confidence that the ultimate project will be successful. Importantly, it does not mean thinking small but rather represents a process that yields a higher probability of success of execution.

Here are three real-life reasons why The Quick Win helps leaders and their teams:

Prioritizing Is Essential, Constantly.

Breaking work into smaller chunks allows you to intensively focus on near term goals. Atisha Patel of NotiCare and Teenpreneur Inc. explained in a

Philadelphia Magazine article that she celebrates small wins with her teams and focuses on the positive in order for the big picture to be realized. Every Sunday, she plans her week ahead. But every night, she tweaks her plan to accommodate whatever happens during the day. Her flexibility and adaptability gives her the opportunity to keep her employees focused. Atisha's leadership really empowers those she works with.

Keep It Simple.

Jeff Bezos, CEO of Amazon, has continuously emphasized keeping things simple for both his leadership strategy and Amazon's mission. Simplicity allows for better communication. I've noticed that many times the people working on a portion of a big project have no idea what the purpose of the project is. On a personal level, they have a role that is likely very specific, but they don't appreciate the purpose, scope and ultimate benefit of the large project. Having smaller projects enables leaders to effectively communicate about why this particular project is so important, and how it fits into a larger context. There is a great story about when President Kennedy visited the Houston Space Center before the launch. He asked a janitor what his job was, and he responded, "I am helping put a man on the moon."

Identify the Drivers of Change.

As I mentioned earlier, the Quick Win is not about diluting the big project nor does it create more work for yourself. Instead, you're empowering your employees to confidently own these smaller projects and increase the likelihood of being on schedule and allowing them to experience success. A recent Harvard Business Review article explains that a number of psychologists agree that small wins allow for positive reinforcement and strategy simplification which can reduce stress and allow your people to think clearly.

While thinking big normally results in huge projects, remember that sometimes taking smaller bites allows an organization to better digest the work and achieve success. As the late, great Steve Jobs said: "If you really look closely, most overnight successes took a long time."

Chapter Five: Empower Your Team To Be Proud Of Their Roles

Most leaders are proud of their position and the company itself. After all, they've put in the time and effort and now find themselves in a position of leadership. All those fortunate enough to be in a position of management should ask themselves a simple question that will make them look at their team differently:

"Are my employees proud of their roles, and the company?"

If you have to spend too much time thinking about the answer, then you probably have some work to do. It all boils down to one word: culture.

I have worked with many leaders whose teams were fundamentally dispassionate and it affected both their behavior and their performance. This culture affects everyone, regardless of the role. Creating the right culture is a great way to keep your people and guaranteeing you deliver consistent, strong results.

I have used and seen the following three techniques really produce great results:

Recognize achievements regularly.

As a leader, you expect and hope that your employees demonstrate a quality work ethic because it's their job to do so. But a bit of encouragement goes a long way. When you recognize their accomplishments, both privately and publicly, they feel good about what they do and it motivates them to continue striving to be even better.

I once worked with a guy named Andrew, a founder and CEO of a company based in Nashville, who really understood how powerful a strong culture is. Every Monday morning, he would stand before the entire team of 250-plus employees and read a list of shout-outs to those employees who did something new, extra and notable.

Of course, Andrew was given these accolades to read from the managers below him, but the point was he took the time out of his schedule every week to give credit to those individuals. Often these forms of public recognition are even more powerful than money.

Enable them to make decisions.

As the leader, one of your core responsibilities is to recruit and develop a strong management team. Yet many leaders refuse to hand over the reins. Why did your hire all of these great folks if you continue to make their decisions for them?

I learned this lesson early on in my career when I led the service establishment business for American Express. On a visit to Dallas, I came across an ad for a partner of American Express. It was by far, the worst ad I had ever seen in my life.

As soon as I got back to my office, I told my VP of marketing, Jim, that I needed to approve every ad to make sure this would never happen again. He smiled, and said, "Okay, if that's what you want."

Several weeks later when I got back from another business trip, I literally could not walk into my office -- it was filled with ads, TV commercials, posters, you name it.

Jim walked by and just smiled. Obviously, there was no way I could approve this volume of ads, nor was there any reason why I should. I asked Jim to create a list of principles and guidelines for our ads that could be administered in the field. I stopped approving ads and got my office back.

If you have situations like the one and find ways to delegate, your staff will appreciate the responsibility given to them, and they may surprise you with what they come up with.

Offer skill development opportunities and resources.

Engaged employees want to grow. They constantly look for opportunities to learn new skills, improve their performance and move up in the company.

As a leader, it's your responsibility to present opportunities for personal growth and skill development.

The reasons companies often give for not doing this is that it takes too much time away from the job, it costs too much, the payback is unclear and so on. Like most generalities, these comments are not correct.

When I look at employee feedback, I see a direct correlation between their satisfaction at work and low turn-over rates. Start with a few simple efforts to get going, measure the effectiveness and results, check in with your employees to gauge their reaction, and roll these and other programs out as you see the results.

Employees who are proud of their roles and their company do a great job and make a demonstrable difference in your results. Use the three techniques to create a really positive culture in your company. Your employees and your customers will thank you.

Part 2: Connecting To Your Customers

Chapter 6: Your Customers- Your Most Vital Connection

The idea that a business needs to treat its customers well, and really understand their likes and dislikes, tastes, and habits, is so obvious it seems hardly worth stating. But oddly enough, many big companies fail in this area. Fundamentally, you're in business to utilize the assets you have to generate a positive return on the investment made by your shareholders. To accomplish this, you sell a product or service to your customers and hopefully earn a profit on each transaction.

It's really that simple.

So why do many companies take their customers for granted or even treat their customers as annoyances? There may be a good explanation for this unintentional behavior. As businesses have grown dramatically—in numbers of customers, products, services offered, and geographic markets—data and reports have increasingly become the primary tools for calibrating results and making decisions. To augment performance data, almost all companies use various forms of customer research, surveys, focus groups, mystery shoppers, and other techniques.

These findings are informative, but often consist of aggregated data and use sophisticated statistical techniques to infer or explain what is going on with customers. While not inaccurate, this information is sterile and missing the tactile, personal element of the business itself—the basic and critical relationship between the company and its customer.

When Macy's opened its first department store in Herald Square, all the executives had their offices on the top floor of the building and were constantly walking the sales floors. They knew firsthand what products were selling and what their customers were saying. As the chain grew to hundreds of stores, it became virtually impossible to maintain that intimacy. Yet, that is exactly what leaders have to do—get with their customers and see what is going on.

To report on what is actually happening on the front lines, a correspondent like Richard Engel of NBC has to physically go to that location. To know what it's like to be buying a product from your company, you have to put yourself in the shoes of a customer. Sadly, few leaders really get this concept. For example, how many executives call their company's customer service number and experience hitting several numerical prompts and listening to music for ten minutes before speaking to an agent? How many retailers spend a few hours in their stores to witness their customers' shopping experiences? How many hospital CEOs have actually admitted themselves to their own emergency rooms to experience the pandemonium from the patient's point of view?

In each of these examples, the experience would be eyeopening and would trigger a series of questions, projects, and other activities to address the findings from these visits.

Is It Customer Satisfaction, or Inertia in Disguise?

I believe there is a substantial inertia factor in many company-customer relationships; that is, customers tend to stay with the companies they are used to dealing with, out of force of habit. Staying doesn't necessarily mean that they like the experience associated with dealing with that company.

It could just be that their experience is generally okay, and they're not sure there is something new or better that warrants making a change. But when something occurs that may be upsetting, unpleasant, or generally not up to their previous experience or expectations, customers start to become more receptive to alternatives. If a competitor provides them with a great offer, then they may try it. If they like the new experience, then they're most likely not coming back to their old company. And here is something really interesting—when that happens, no one in headquarters either knows or cares—it's lost in the numbers.

For example, a few years ago I had a very bad experience with my American Express Platinum card, where I had been a member since 1974. Fed up, I stopped all spending on that card and began using my Visa card instead. No one from American Express ever realized or cared that I had left, after forty years, and more important, no one reached out to me to ask why. They could have won me back, but they didn't try.

With certain products and services, the switching cost is high, which often keeps customers from changing companies.

Let's say you have a checking account with Chase where your paycheck is directly deposited and all your bills are electronically paid from this account. You're not very happy, they've made a few mistakes recently on your monthly statement, and you've just received an interesting offer from Wells Fargo to open a new account. While it seems intriguing, you've got hours of work in front of you to switch all your accounts and ultimately decide you'll stay with Chase—even though you aren't that thrilled with them.

They probably are unaware of your unhappiness, and you'll likely stay until something really bad happens and you can't take it anymore. (At that point, you are more than willing to change, regardless of how many hours of work you need to do.)

In my neighborhood, we had a Food Emporium supermarket—a very dated, dilapidated, and totally unappealing store. But it was the only one in our neighborhood. Then Fairway, an up-and-coming chain, opened a few blocks away and began to change the competitive landscape by providing customers with a wider choice of products at lower prices.

One year later, Whole Foods opened a huge store in the same neighborhood with even more options for the shopper; they were very focused on meeting the growing demand for organic food. Within six months of Whole Foods opening, Food Emporium was losing customers so quickly that they decided to close this store. Another firm called Morton Williams, who owns a small chain of boutique supermarkets in New York City—each designed to reflect the needs of the individual neighborhood—saw the possibility of a great location. Despite these two powerful new competitors, they assumed Food Emporium's lease, modernized the store layout and product assortment, and introduced the store under their new brand. The store competes very effectively—it's the most convenient of the three, and it is now a pleasurable experience to shop there.

Interestingly, Food Emporium is owned by A&P, which in addition to being the first major supermarket chain in the United States has the distinction of filing for bankruptcy twice. The point is that Food Emporium was clearly not listening to their customers. They relied on inertia, which worked fine until new competitors entered the market. Sometimes when I listen to leaders talking about their customers, it almost sounds as if they "own" them, and they are confident they will stay forever. The truth is, no one owns customers and you have to earn their trust and respect every day. And that is why you have to be connected with them, communicate with them regularly, and really understand what they want from you and how they feel about you.

Patagonia is one company that really gets it right. Founded by Yvon Chouinard in 1973, Patagonia sells high-end outdoor clothing. There is intense competition in this industry with companies like The North Face, Marmot, Columbia, Descente, Mountain Hardwear, and numerous others. Patagonia has its own retail stores and also sells its products in other major sporting goods retailers and specialty stores.

In the interest of full disclosure, I have been buying their merchandise for twenty years and am a very happy and loyal customer. Everything they do is customer centric. Their products are extremely well designed and well manufactured, and they last forever. They perform exactly as advertised. And the company provides seamless service throughout their channels of customer interaction— in store, online, and through telephone customer support.

They recruit staff for their stores who are perfectly suited to sell this clothing. Healthy, outdoorsy men and women, they are the embodiment of the brand. Most are familiar with the technical nature of some of the garments, and all seem very happy working for Patagonia. I have shopped in numerous Patagonia stores throughout the United States over the years and have seen the same characteristics and qualities in the staff wherever am. In short, they hire people who want to work there. I had a Patagonia ski jacket that I really enjoyed until the zipper broke. Not knowing what to do, I went to one of their stores in Manhattan and showed them my jacket. The salesperson, Jane, said it would be quite difficult to fix and they would replace it (even though I had bought it two and a half years before). As they no longer made that specific model, Jane walked me over to the jacket section and showed me a similar jacket, found my size and color, and gave it to me to try on. It was perfect, but I noticed the price was about eighty dollars more than what I had paid for the original jacket. It is important to mention here that up to this point, Jane had not asked me for my name, a sales receipt (which I no longer had), or anything else. Jane took me back to the sales counter, asked for my name and zip code, found me in their database, scanned the jacket, placed it in a shopping bag, and wished me a good day.

When I mentioned to her that the new jacket cost more than my original jacket, she gave me a big smile and said, “It’s your lucky day.”

Patagonia clearly did not have to make this exchange with me, but it actually does make sense, because I will likely be buying clothes from them for the next twenty years. Customer service is a one-on-one business, and you need to get granular and find ways to connect with your customers individually.

Reach Out and Touch Them

Rick McVey, founder, chairman, and CEO of the electronic bond trading company MarketAxess Holdings, is reshaping the way corporate bonds are being traded in the capital markets. His company, now sixteen years old, is a fully electronic low-cost exchange; it replaces the traditional trading platforms where individual bond trades were placed by phone and then processed through the participating banks. When I interviewed him, one of the first things I asked was, “Do you stay close with your customers?” McVey’s response was immediate:

“That is primarily what our sales team does. We have around one hundred clients, who are the really big buyers of bonds. We’ve integrated all of our systems into theirs, to make it easier for them, but also to make sure we are vitally important to them. When we come up with a new product, or acquire a new technology, we can integrate it onto our platform so that the client gets the benefit seamlessly. Because we bond so closely with our customers, they tell us who else is calling on them, so that’s another way we get a fix on the market—and specifically those new companies who are seeking to take market share from us."

McVey went on to say that many of their new products can be directly attributable to understanding their customers' pain points and being aware of other opportunities their customers are exploring. That type of intelligence is priceless.

Of the Five Engagement Principles that I speak about in my book Why Are There Snowblowers in Miami?, one of the most important—if not the most important—for leaders to adopt is connecting to the people who buy or use your product or service. So how do you begin connecting with your customers?

There are three ways to find out what your customers want, feel, and think: Though phone interaction, field trips or onsite visits, and by being your own customer (putting yourself in their shoes).

Calls

The people on the phone with your customers represent your company more than many leaders seem to be aware of. A customer's experience on the phone—whether it is in the normal course of business, or whether you are surveying your customers to gauge their level of satisfaction—is critically important to your business. Compare it to the treatment diners receive from waiters in a restaurant: good service means more customers, but poor service means you may not be in business for long.

Here is an example of how not to do it. I am a subscriber of the Verizon FIOS service and received a letter that my high-speed Internet service was being upgraded to the top speed possible and the monthly cost for my bundled service was going down. All I had to do was just call the phone number specified in the letter, and I would be all set. Clearly, this is something I was happy to do; sadly, the letter was the only good part of this story.

When I called, I was asked why I was calling (Answer: because you sent me the letter), what was my problem (Answer: I didn't think I had one), and why did I want to change my service (Answer: I didn't). At the end of twenty minutes on the phone, a service call was scheduled for Verizon technicians to come to my home to replace certain equipment. I was offered time slots that were pretty wide (9 a.m.–12 p.m.) but my technician showed up at 12:30 anyway, complaining about traffic (bad traffic is normal for Manhattan, and is not a good excuse).

After looking around, he informed me that my specific configuration (whatever that means) is ineligible for the upgrade, and that he cannot do anything. When I explained the whole process I went through, he said unapologetically, "They don't know what they're doing in sales—they just make calls, try to sign people up and make their numbers, and then we have to deal with all of that on our end." (I still have the original high-speed service, by the way.)

In contrast, here is an example of getting it right. We recently took a trip to Southeast Asia visiting Hong Kong, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Malaysia, and the itinerary— especially regarding flights—had to be tightly coordinated. A few days before we left, I called Cathay Pacific's customer service (via Skype) to clarify a few points about baggage allowance, check in times, etc. As soon as the agent accessed my records, she noticed one of our connecting flights did not allow sufficient time for us, and that it should not have been booked this way. She then said, "I understand we made this mistake, and I will get this fixed—please hold on." To straighten this out, she needed to consult with several different level supervisors, but came back on the line within fifteen minutes and told me everything was sorted out. In this case I was more than happy to have been put on hold while the agent went to such lengths to help me. Obviously I was very thankful and was even more impressed when we checked in at JFK and the agent there apologized again for this potential mishap. They had actually noted the entire episode in my file, and this agent felt the need to explain again. That is connecting with your customer.

Visits and Field Trips

As I have made clear in many other chapters of this book and my others, it is essential for you to get out of your office and go to visit the places where your customers and employees interact. This gets at the very core of engagement. So how, practically speaking, do you arrange these field trips? Who should you speak to, what do you actually do, and what do you hope to discover? Let's start with what you should not do. The joke in the United Kingdom is that the Queen wonders why every place she visits smells like fresh paint. That's because every place she visits is freshly painted several days before she arrives! A service center leader that I was meeting with described what seemed to be a corporate version of the Queen's visit scenario—it was an account of how the former head of his division conducted her visits to the service center.

"These visits were scheduled six months in advance and were highly orchestrated," he told me. "She flew in on the corporate jet with her entourage and had a limo take her and her team to our center. We served them donuts and coffee, made a bunch of presentations to them—they asked a few questions, and then they left."

I asked him, somewhat incredulously, "Didn't they actually go into the center itself, walk around, talk to people and get a good sense of the operation, meet with the folks, etc.?"

"No," he replied, "and that's why the team was so unprepared for your visit. Even though you sent explicit instructions as to what you wanted to accomplish while you were here, they simply could not imagine another type of visit from someone at HQ."

Clearly, you should not just go through the motions. You'd be better off doing nothing (or going bowling) than to go on a superficial visit. Unless you really let your hair down and get in there—ask, look, engage—you will never discover what is really going on. Don't think of your visit as a guided tour. Don't just go to the area or department that your host wants to show you. In fact, whatever it is they want to show you is probably the area you least want to see. The folks you are visiting are motivated to put the best face on whatever the situation is, but your mission is to look behind the curtain. The more a visit is planned and choreographed, the less realistic it is, and therefore the lower its value. And the more senior in the organization you are, the more likely it is that the people organizing the visit will want to plan a great agenda for you—of what they think you should see.

To some extent, it can be self-serving—they don't want you to see anything that isn't perfect. In some cases, they have not seen it themselves, so it would be highly embarrassing for you to see something about their operation that they are unaware of. I've seen this kind of situation countless times.

On one memorable trip in Jakarta, James, the Indonesia country head for our company, took me to meet a very important client that I wanted to get to know. This was someone James assured me he had met several times. As we were driving to the client's office, found it strange that James did not seem to know the directions. When we were introduced to the client (by the client's assistant), he graciously said to me, "It's very nice to meet you," and to James he offered, "It's very nice to meet you as well!"

Needless to say the car ride back to our office was not the best conversation James and I had ever had. The other type of constructive field trip is visiting a location where employees interact with customers—such as a retail store. When you make these visits, you do not have to pretend you are not an executive—this is not Undercover Boss. But you might just dress down a bit, to put everyone at ease. You are just there to observe—maybe help a salesperson put the shirt in the bag. Your goal is to listen to your employees talking to the customers, to watch people waiting in line to go into the dressing room, and to make mental notes when customers are bitching about how you don't have the color or size they want. Notice how they touch the merchandise. Then you can talk to your employees and find out what they think about the various issues at that store—about what is working and more importantly, what needs to be changed.

Be a Customer

Do unto others is an old adage, but it is rarely thought of in the context of company leaders and customers. The person at the very top of the organization should know what it is like on the other side of the exchange. Not too long ago I had the pleasure of speaking with Eli Zabar at his new Eli's Essentials store and café on Madison Avenue. The Zabar name is well known in Manhattan, and Eli split with his two brothers to form his own business in 1973 on the East Side, when he opened the EAT gourmet food shop and café on Madison Avenue.

Today Eli Zabar runs a very large retail, restaurant, and commercial baking company. “I do believe in good service—everything I do in business, and outside of business, is an attempt to satisfy myself,” he said. “I have zero patience to wait on line. My wife and I went to the museum to see a new exhibit, and if they told me they were giving away Rembrandt’s while we were waiting on line, I still wouldn’t want to stay in line. I’m extremely impatient—and I don’t want anyone else to wait in line either.”

I asked Zabar how this affects what happens in his stores.

“If I see four people waiting on line in one of my stores, and I see an employee who is doing something else, the something else is the wrong thing. The right thing is for them to drop what they are doing and serve the next customer on line. If they are on the telephone, they need to excuse themselves from that activity, because the more important activity, unless it is an emergency, is to take care of the customers on the line, and to the other person to hold on or call them back.”

“And how do your employees respond to this direction?” I asked.

“We all get so involved in the activity of the moment—it almost seems rude to the employee to tell them to stop what they are doing to focus on the customer. But it doesn’t matter, because the customer is the most important part of the business.” Eli Zabar clearly gets it.

If you are the CEO or an exec of a chain of shoe stores, it would naturally behoove you to wander into one or your stores on a regular basis and (anonymously) buy a pair of shoes, to see what the experience is like. It’s like spending the night in your own guest room. How else can you ever really know what your guest’s overnight stay is like? Being your own customer is part of employing the Fresh Eyes principle—in this case it’s the customer’s eyes you are borrowing.

When I was chatting with Tom Hale of Backroads, I asked him, “When you go on a trip with your wife and kids, are you going on them like someone else would go?”

“Absolutely,” he replied. “I go like any other guest would go. I’ve been on hundreds of trips; I still go on several trips every year. I’m having a great time, doing whatever is happening.

However, my eyes and ears are always open. Always talking to the leaders. (I don’t get into the kitchen anymore like I did the first five years and ask them why dinner isn’t ready. That turned out to be a losing proposition.) But I never come back from a trip without observations on how that trip could be better; but more important, I come back with observations about how we can, company-wide, systems-wide, do things differently.

Virtually every piece of information you will see on a trip originated from an observation I had personally on a trip. For example, there’s ‘straight talk.’ That is a bit of branded information that is in a travel planner, something that has higher visibility, and is actually about something about that trip that not everyone in the world will respond positively to. We want to highlight these ‘blemishes,’ because we don’t want people on the trip that have an expectation that is entirely different.”

Of course, most leaders are likely to be customers of their own products and services. If you are the CEO of Verizon, I highly doubt you have a cell phone contract with AT&T.

But there are subtleties and nuances. Often, companies identify board directors, top executives, and other influential people to receive “white glove” service. Simply put, these individuals do not experience what we mere mortals do. They have special customer service numbers, answered immediately by a real person, who generally can solve their problem on the spot. They experience all the good things and none of the bad.

Unfortunately for them, they are not seeing an accurate picture of the company. Many years ago, when I found out about this practice, I basically turned off the “white glove” service because I thought everyone should experience both the good and the bad, which would help us fix whatever problems we had. Sounded good in principle, until a director called me to say that his wife was being “harassed” by one of our collection agents. It seemed she had run up a very sizable bill and was not paying us, which only became evident when we turned off the white glove service. Gently, I explained the situation to him, and duly embarrassed, he assured me it would be taken care of. The key takeaway from this story is: No white glove service for executives and directors!

If you are not already doing this, or you are but you are doing it only sporadically, here are several recommendations that relate to the Connecting principle. First and foremost, make a real commitment to spend a specific amount of time meeting with customers, either in groups or individually.

These encounters should be scheduled in advance and should be no fewer than six times per year, for maybe two hours each. That is twelve hours for the year, a long day for most leaders, and an amount of time that you can certainly find in your schedule. By the way, you can also make impromptu visits a well, such as when I visited the Sears store in Miami—you can always find an opportunity to spend time with your customers.

This is an interesting, rewarding, and fun process—you are meeting with people who buy your stuff, and presumably are more happy than unhappy about what you offer them. Be open, let your hair down, and engage with them to find out what they like, what they don’t like, what they would change, what else they would like you to offer, what annoys them about what you do, etc. You’ll be amazed at what you learn—and I promise you this: you will learn more than you could ever imagine. Be sure to take good notes—I often come away from these sessions with most of a legal pad filled with great comments, suggestions, and ideas.

That was actually the easy part; now the real work starts. You need to report back to your leadership team about what you learned at your sessions. You need to see by their reactions how much is “new news” to them, because that in and of itself is a great diagnostic about how involved your team is. But the most important part of this report out, is the “so what, now what” portion. Specifically, what are you and your leadership team going to do to address the issues raised, what work needs to be done to address and improve these findings? How are you individually and collectively going to deal with the feedback you've received? This is the crucial part because unless you engage in this exercise, the report is merely a series of interesting anecdotes from the field.

To ensure this process goes full circle, the Meeting Czar will ensure that future reviews are calendared, which forces everyone to address the findings. In future quarters, the financial results will begin to reflect your responsiveness to your customers with lower attrition, higher sales and customer satisfaction, and higher Net Promoter Scores (NPS).

Finally, six months later, you should be hearing different issues from your customers, as there is always something else to focus on—but you should not be hearing the same comments you heard last time. Otherwise, as Ricky Ricardo famously said in the I Love Lucy series, "Lucy, you've got some s'plaining to do!" I really like NPS because it gets to the core issue. It asks anywhere from one to ten questions, all based on a scale from 1–10 (highest). The most important question to me is "Would you recommend this company, product, service to a friend?" The response to this one question encapsulates the entire customer experience. If I'm not entirely happy, I'm not going to recommend the company.

Chapter 7: Creative A Rewarding Employee-Customer Relationship

If you were asked who the most important people to your business are, you might be tempted to say your employees. However, while they are clearly essential, it's your customers who really keep your company alive and growing. The men and women who buy from you are your lifeline and path to success. Why is it then that so many leaders and their employees often behave as if their customers are a burden? How can you say that you are customer focused when someone calling to speak to you is greeted with a recording that says "the current hold time to speak with one of our associates is 9 minutes" -- really?

Leaders must prioritize the complete customer experience and find new, innovative ways to strengthen this relationship. Most leaders do stress the importance of customers, but often their decisions and actions are not in sync with their words. Customers often get short changed as operational cost savings and are implemented to improve short term earnings at the expense of disenfranchising them. Over time, this type of behavior encourages customers to find alternatives, and when they leave, they rarely come back.

Here are four ways you can inspire a pro-customer mindset amongst your employees.

Don't Waste Your Customer's Time on the Phone

Your customers really do not want to call you, and only do so when something is not right. It could be a billing problem, a technical question, an item or some other question. They want their problem solved satisfactorily and as quickly as possible.

Your job is to make sure your employees are fully trained, empathetic, have the tools needed to solve problems and be concise. They and their supervisors also need some guard rails where they can not just quote the policy, but have a bit of latitude to make an intelligent decision in an unusual situation.

Understand your metrics and make sure your customer service center is properly staffed. The benefits of all of the advice above is substantially diluted if the customer has to wait ten minutes to speak with someone, and even worse if they then need to be transferred to another agent.

Don't Assume Your Customers Are Going to Stay

I often tell my clients this shocking truth - your customers vote with their wallet on each transaction, and they don't have to return to your company -- your competition is just a transaction away. This is especially true with online purchases which are a click away. You need to stress how vital understanding your customers is. I always go out and meet with customers, one on one and ask them how things are going -- What they like, what they don't like, what they would like the company to do differently. It is amazing how open customers are when you solicit their input. I always come away learning so much about the company.

As your leaders and employees see the example you set, they will be encouraged to do the same, unleashing an army of your folks who are engaging with your customers. It is time well spent that is valuable, profitable and enjoyable.

Deter Employees from Bad Mouthing Customers

Every employee has had a negative experience with a customer -- it's part of the customer service role by definition. As a result, it's only normal that coworkers rant amongst themselves about their frustrations. Over time, this behavior shapes the way they interact with your customers in an insidious way that even they may not be aware of.

Your job as a leader is to create an environment that does not allow this toxic behavior to exist. Managers and supervisors need to be aware of this behavior and take decisive corrective action quickly. Remember, your customers are not public enemy number one!

Become the Customer

Switch positions and put yourself in your customers shoes. Would you be happy with this experience? Is there something you would like to change?

In every job I have had, and in every client I have advised, I actually shop the company. I buy stuff, visit stores, call into call centers and really try to get the raw customer experience. I often find lots of good things and I always find things that can be changed.

As the leader you should be highly curious and constantly ask the questions -- how does this work, how can we make it better, why do we do it this way, etc.? The answers are golden and making changes based on your experiences will definitely translate into a better customer experience.

The customer is always right. Whoever came up with this expression had tremendous insight and awareness. Customers are not annoying, even when they are annoying. They pay your salaries, bonuses and satisfaction, provide you with the cash flow to grow.

Conclusion

I hope you've enjoyed this ebook and found a number of useful techniques to enhance your leadership skills. The more you practice these skills, the more the others in your organization will realize its benefits and mimic what you do. There is great leverage in transferring these skills. Your customers will vote with their wallets, continuing to buy your goods and services as they realize you have connected to them and delivering to them what they want.

Best of all, you will enjoy this process. You will learn a lot more about your employees, and the more you do, the more you will realize their value to the company. From them and your customers, you will discover opportunities for you to excel, and they will reward you with additional business. This works for everyone. Have fun!

To Learn More About Steven D. Goldstein,
Visit Him Online Today:
www.StevenDGoldstein.com