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The Spirit of Performance

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Issue: #6

May 2007

At the start of May a wonderful series of mid-Atlantic engagements--hospital leaders, hospital volunteers, med. practice admins. and teaching assistants--really got me thinking about leadership. And a little girl I met 35 years ago.



I want to share with you some thoughts about managers...and the Fear to Lead.

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THE FEAR TO LEAD

1973, working at one of Greensboro, NC's, inner-city parks, I met Jasmine: four years old, completely cute and sweet.

But my first day at the park, as I left my car and called, "Good morning," Jasmine looked at me, froze a second, and ran like a deer to hide behind her sister, Angela.

For a week, Jasmine did not acknowledge me. She did not even look me in the eye. She refused to play new games I introduced or the kids invented. Jasmine whispered names of familiar games she would rather play as she held back at the start of every new game.

After a week, she relented slowly and came around to playing kickball. Jasmine learned the game quickly. She refused her turn to kick if anyone was on base. She insisted someone take her place.

2007, just last week, I spoke with a CEO about the leadership

retreat for his hospital's 50-person team. He said he wants them to come away thinking of themselves as leaders, not as managers.

I listened. I took notes. I made three projections:

1. A few managers will jump at encouragement to wear the leader's hat more readily and more often.
2. "I'm busy enough as a manager without taking on new skills and responsibilities" is a not uncommon (though perhaps unspoken) reaction.
3. More managers prefer to continue managing comfortably while someone else takes on challenges of leading.

As I thought of my reactions, I also thought of Jasmine. I recognized a direct comparison between Jasmine and the managers: fear.

Jasmine feared coming out of her comfort zone to interact with a complete stranger. Managing is not easy, maybe not any easier than leading. Still, manage long enough and it becomes your comfort zone. You may lead spontaneously and instinctively many times a day. However, formally engaging in leadership challenges can seem stepping out of your comfort zone.

Jasmine feared the unknown of new, unfamiliar games. New skills and responsibilities introduced into your management comfort zone are unknown and can be imposing, even threatening, until you master them. You may find it easier to devote extra time and attention to what you already do comfortably and so delay taking on the new and different.

Jasmine, a savvy four year-old, feared failure in front of her friends and family. She chose to relinquish her turn kicking, especially when someone was in scoring position. Not every manager jumps at the chance to lead new projects or assignments. It may feel more secure not to take the risk but to leave it to someone else. Leadership can be risky.

The Jasmine-comparisons may refer to you or individuals on your staff. Either way, it pays to move through the fears, bring out the leadership, and strengthen the performance.

Jasmine had three fears. I had three projections. Let's go with three suggestions:

1. **Initiate an end-of-the-week *Here's How I Led e-mail sharing*.** Encourage every individual to send out a brief e-mail before 3 p.m. on Friday. At staff meetings, around the water cooler, in informal conversations, these e-mails will generate leadership comfort, learning,

and eagerness. (If everyone does not have e-mail access, consider 3x5 index cards on a bulletin board.)

2. **Develop leadership partnerships.** Invite staff members to partner up and support each other's leadership efforts. Encourage the partners to get together weekly and share the times and ways they've taken on a leadership role. In time their conversations will evolve to feedback, questions and answers, suggestions. Their willingness and enjoyment of leading will increase.
3. **Put leadership on the agenda.** Bring leadership into your people's comfort zone. Make it a regular discussion item at staff meetings. Alternate between standard topics such as: *This Meeting's Leadership Tips* and *I Could Use a Leadership Suggestion*.

The first topic engages participants in sharing what has worked for them or what they've seen work for someone else. The second allows the freedom to ask for ideas to help one be a better leader. Both make leadership a more acceptable idea and ideal for your people.

These will help your people move through the Fear to Lead.

Let's Talk!

If you and your hospital, medical practice or long-term care facility want to innovate your leadership style and skills, call or e-mail me. Whether we work together or not, we can talk about my Engagement Theory and how it may apply to leadership improvement, just like it applies to every other performance that works (or doesn't) in your organization.

And if we DO work together, I'll knock 10% of the standard fee.

Offer Expires: June 15, 2007.

QUOTEWORTHY

Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood. Now is the time to understand more, so that we may fear less.
 ~ ~ Marie Curie

TIPS OF THE ICEBERG

1. Reflect consciously and regularly upon your leadership. Ask and answer detailed and focused questions that start with *Why?*



What? How?

2. Consider alternatives more often than you currently do. Although you may stick with the tried and true most often, it helps to consider alternative.
3. Keep a notebook or journal to record your ideas and reflections from the two tips above.

Please let me hear from you. I want to know your reactions to the Spirit of Performance e-zine. I'd like to know your thoughts about performance, performance improvement. I welcome any stories you will share about what works or doesn't for you.

Sincerely,



Timothy Wright
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