

**LEADERSHIP INSIGHTS
FOR EMPLOYEES**

by

Ken Graham, Ph.D.

Foreword

It is so easy to just go through our day without the needed reminder of the purpose and value of our work. To “just work” can, sometimes for no other reason than sheer familiarity, lead to the frustrations of boredom. Less than fully effective leadership, characterized perhaps by under-leadership, command and control, lack of appreciation for work well done, or emphasis on politics rather than the joy of results, can contribute to the dissatisfactions that can creep in and over time.

Experienced employees benefit from the *Leadership Insights* by being able to revisit the purpose and meaning of their work. This greatly reduces the time wasting and stress building behaviors we’re all capable of, such as complaining, petty and not so petty interpersonal conflict, passive-aggressive behavior, and collective entitlement thinking and inaction. We, as experienced employees, must avoid the syndrome in which we simply blame our leaders. We must take responsibility for an effective workplace. The *Leadership Insights* shows us how to begin this journey.

New employees look first and foremost to experienced employees for signals about work and the values and behaviors that are desirable in our workplace. Lacking guidance, each experienced employee can give out different and potentially conflicting messages about workplace expectations. *Leadership Insights for Employees* can serve to guide new employees in setting their expectations early. Likewise *Leadership Insights for Employees* can guide experienced employees in transmitting consistent values and behaviors to new employees.

Leaders have a special responsibility that begins with the observation that they, too, are employees. Leaders must further the organization purpose by thoughtful values, actions, words, and changes that build organization capability, including employee capability.

Owner-leaders in smaller enterprises are not exempt. Leaders must guard against the emotion “this is MY ‘empire’” as they transmit values and behaviors through action first, then words.

Please be sure to read “Acknowledgments” below to capture its content messages.

Acknowledgments

Ever work where one or many employees crafted and built the work culture in very productive and joyful ways? If so, you’ve experienced the true joy of working with colleagues who are mutually supportive. Boredom can’t exact its emotional toll there. Neither can negative stress. For me, that first experience was Penn State Executive Programs. Twenty-three people were dedicated to serving over 1,000 leaders per year as these leaders made investments in their ongoing leadership development. The wisdom of experienced employees was consciously transmitted to newer arrivals as we grew 35% per year.

Contrast this with a social studies department in a high school environment. Weak leadership at the principal level collided with an entrenched faculty who had collectively decided that they received no respect. Groupthink led to over estimation of accomplishments by the faculty. This led to anger that their contributions weren't recognized. Animosity toward leadership was compounded by a principal who would say what was expected to get through a meeting, then declare that circumstances later changed. His driver was to have no visible conflict so that his promotions would keep coming. They didn't.

Each of these scenarios provided valuable input. Clearly one shows what to do. Jan, Jean, Ray, Al, Ginny, Lisa, Kent, Terri—you are role models. The second group showed what not to do, with two exceptions. Michelle and Tracy, as new employees, saw the cultural disease of the social studies department and acted with principle. The others couldn't see what they had done to the students and to themselves. They imposed majority tyranny on the new employees. Michelle and Tracy are superb examples of not compromising true purpose.

Jesse White, Secretary of State of Illinois, also transmits the messages of this *Leadership Insights for Employees* work. I first met him when he brought inner city young men he'd organized into a tumbling team to perform in our daughters' school. This was 20 years ago. He wasn't just coaching tumbling, he was teaching self-esteem. His team members went on to become major contributors to society as adults. He was elected Illinois Secretary of State not because of political connections, but because he used self-esteem to give. Giving is receiving. Give what you need. Give self-esteem to others to receive it.

Leadership Insights for Employees

I. Your Purpose

- Do no one harm—work colleagues, customers, suppliers, family members, friends, strangers.
- Do good spontaneously to and for others.
- Add value.
- Produce. Note that we are all consumers at times. But that is not our goal, nor our purpose. We are here to produce value for others so that we may enjoy the satisfaction of creation.
- Produce much more than you receive. We all receive as children (though hopefully we give joy). Balance your life by giving more than you have received. Extend yourself.
- Are you cutting stones or building a cathedral? Point of view is the beginning.
- Working to pay bills or to serve? Servant's heart will elevate your personal sense of purpose.
- Give coaching, development, friendship, support, presence. Give.
- Giving is much more satisfying than getting. Make giving your focus.
- Give to co-workers, to clients, to leaders. You're really giving the gift of a generous spirit to yourself.
- Such giving is accomplished by arriving at work refreshed from a good night's sleep, with an attitude of joy and of caring for others through the impact you'll have. I have visited a driver services facility run by the State of Illinois that has such a joyous attitude. These people improve their customers just by anticipation and smiling. We can do this in any work environment.
- We choose our attitudes. Choose generosity.
- Focus on co-workers and teamwork. Generously support.
- Focus your team effort on serving customers together.
- Manage customer mood. Mood is the only thing more noticed than results. The measurement of results is oftentimes based on unpredictable customer expectations, which can be way out of line. Manage mood to manage expectations. Manage customer expectations to manage customer delight, even if your customers are internal to your organization.
- There are no bad days. If you actually woke up this morning, it is a good day. Choose to see it as such, because we choose our moods.
- How we interpret what happens around us is key to satisfaction from each day. Interpretations are only an example of opinions. We choose our opinions, and can choose other opinions in a given situation. For example, we can choose to interpret perceived inattention from our leader as either "being undervalued" or "being fully supported."
- A noble personal purpose is to develop personally. This isn't just found in formal education. New work experience with more complex work is part of development. One can develop while staying in the same job just by growing personally. Community service can contribute to growth at work and vice versa.

- Develop yourself through observation. Who do you admire at work, in your family, in society? What do they do? What attitudes do they choose? Adapt these characteristics to your gifts and personality.
- Try this exercise. Go to a fast food restaurant when there is a line. Note the various moods of customers waiting, of those being served. Note the moods of the employees. Where does joy come from? Pride? Purpose? Which employees and customers are making ineffective choices? Which employees and customers are developing themselves?
- Try things. New skills satisfy our need to grow.
- Tolerate your own failures. Be honest. Call it a setback or a failure. Extract the lesson. Move on. Don't take the self-judgment "I failed" with you. People who fail find out that they only fall down and get their pants dirty. Get up. Take the lesson with you, nothing more. It may take weeks or months to get over the failure, but no more.
- You can never achieve true success at the expense of others. Leadership is about positive impact.
- You succeed to the degree that others you touch succeed.

II. Organization Purpose

- "Make money" and "make money by..." are never the purpose of the organization (though they may be the goal of self-centered organizers and owners)
- Organizations exist to serve customers. Serving with tasty, safe, wholesome food might describe a cereal maker. The United States Postal Service provides prompt, accurate delivery in order to serve. For an overnight delivery company, service means consistent delivery by the promised time.
- Organizational purposes can include serving, protecting, entertaining, connecting, providing, caring for patients or residents. Organizational purposes do not make, sell, distribute, etc. These latter may be how the organization serves, entertains, protects, connects, etc.
 - An oil and gas company helps make mobility possible through fuels and road materials (asphalt).
 - An insurance company makes it possible for families to prosper by sharing risks of home ownership, driving, even personal health, disability, and loss of life.
- Why does purpose matter so much? Because employees need to connect to something larger than themselves. Not sharing purpose with employees denies them the nobility of their contribution. It may seem like a package delivery to the courier, but it is a closing document on a new house to the recipient. Help the courier see the noble purpose of the package delivery.
- Noble purpose and a little employee imagination bring into focus the importance of the work and why doing it right is so important. For example, Is your day spent with auto insurance policies? You're not underwriting, sales, claims, or administration, you're protecting families. Accidents do happen. Family financial futures can be devastated from the consequences of

accidents. You protect the futures of children and adults. What a loss if an accident liability, uninsured, cost children their future education and productive lives because proper insurance wasn't in force.

- Each employee needs to feel well led. This is not dependency. This is the desire to contribute to something larger than oneself. Employees and leaders who provide noble purpose can celebrate the discretionary effort and great work climate that result.
- What is your organization's purpose? If to enrich its owners, it will struggle. If to enrich the experiences of its employees and thereby its customers, it will prosper, grow, change as it must, provide employee opportunities.
 - The Secretary of State's Driver Services Office facilitates personal mobility and personal protection. How? By licensing drivers to a proficiency standard (safety) and by registering our vehicles to reduce the likelihood of their being stolen or used in commission of a crime (identity).
- To find your organization's purpose, elevate your thoughts above the day to day. Whom does your organization serve? Does your organization serve with delight or reluctantly? What does your organization make possible? Convenience? Health? Growth? Spend time on this question. Talk to your leaders, your peers. Above all apply your common sense. Banish cynicism (sense of no hope). Reduce skeptical self-talk (for example, "we're just chasing dollars").
- You are the steward of your organization's purpose.
- Purpose provides the power that leads us (employees) to care about the outcome of our work.
- Want to see the power of caring about the outcome? Why do fans sit outdoors in winter conditions in Green Bay and Chicago to cheer on their favorite teams? They care about the outcome. They come to encourage the team and each other. Who wouldn't want that spirit at work?

III. Employees—Choose Your Attitude

- Attitudes are chosen.
- Just as we choose our opinions and can therefore opt for different opinions in a given situation, we can choose our attitude from among a range of possibilities.
- Are you a producer or a consumer? We're all consumers at times and of many things. Nothing wrong with consuming what we need, and some of what we want (if it doesn't come at the expense of others). We need to be producers at work.
- A producer's attitude asks "how can I serve," then does so immediately. Experienced employees with a producer's attitude can see an opportunity to serve coming. Anticipation plus service equals delight. Delight for customers means job security. Delight for employees builds development, personal satisfaction, and an organization that truly serves its purpose.

- Do you work to give, or do you work to get? Deeply experienced employees know that work is about giving—to colleagues, to customers, even to the organization. What a contrast to the thinking that says “this organization doesn’t appreciate me” and “I deserve more.”
- Perhaps the organization really doesn’t appreciate you. You can still choose your reaction. Do you appreciate yourself? Is that self-appreciation coming as vengeance against the organization you see as unappreciative? If so, entitlement thinking (I deserve recognition, more pay, better schedule because of who I am and how good I am) will soon follow.
- Entitlement thinking is driven by misplaced ego, and it does far more damage to the person choosing that attitude than to coworkers, bosses, the organization.
- The only effective cure for the corrosion of entitlement thinking is giving with a generous spirit.
- Can’t give with a generous spirit where you are because of too much that has been said and done (by you and others)? Then you must change departments, locations, and even employers. Take only your attitude of generosity with you and leave behind all sense of entitlement.

IV. Continual Self-Development is Key

- Begin with the end in mind (from *Seven Habits of Highly Successful People* by Dr. Stephen Covey). We all have the desire for self-improvement, even when our actions say otherwise. New Year’s resolutions last, on average, three weeks! We need to be smarter about our self-development.
- What are your personal goals? To be better at service, to produce more, to be more joyful at work and at home? Be willing to take steps today.
- Be patient. It takes at least six weeks of practice to modify a self-defeating habit.
- Start with replacement. Substitute a worthy behavior for a less worthy one. An example is gossip. Negative talk about a colleague or family member when they’re absent lacks integrity. Instead, help that person with his/her strengths.
- Career success isn’t built on being well rounded. When we are young, our parents often advise us to improve in our areas of weakness. You can’t be the best admin assistant, the best scientist, multilingual, and the best leader all at once. You might be each of these at times in your working life.
- Career success is built by working on one or two of your strengths or strongest desires, and by having a larger vision of your contribution.
- Begin with vision. Many of us see ourselves in terms of the present job we have. (This is one reason that job loss is SO threatening.) Give yourself the gift of seeing yourself as more than your current job. Here is an example of a woman seeing herself as more than her current job:
 - I once did a development day for a group of admin assistants in an oil and gas company. The session was called “Dealing with Difficult Situations.” Anticipation and rehearsal are key here, so we did role play in pairs. At break, one woman asked me for my advice. She told me that in her church

she'd recently agreed to chair a mission activities committee. Her predecessor remained on the committee as a member. She asked me to role play with her some of the things this less-than-supportive predecessor threw at her. The admin assistant was a true leader in her community, and saw that the tools from her employer could help her contribute in work and community roles. I was delighted to do the role playing one on one during lunch. Three others asked to observe us as we did so. They also wanted to extract the value.

- Know your strengths and desires. Many of us don't.
- Start by asking colleagues you trust to name something you do well. When someone says "you organize events well" or "you handle irate customers well" or "you orient new people well and make them feel included," say "thank you." Ask another colleague. Ask your boss. It is okay to tell them you're trying to map strengths as part of self-development. The items mentioned, if you agree, are your strengths.
- A strength of mine is public speaking, but it wasn't always so. At age 18, I had a public speaking disaster. I thought, "You'll never have a business career unless you fix this." (That was me extracting the lesson, and fortunately I moved on.) I put myself into situations where I had to speak. Nine years later I noticed that I was having fun.
- Interests are harder to identify. Colleagues don't know your dreams. Dr. Joyce Brothers created a simple exercise she calls the "Quick List" technique. Take a blank sheet of paper. List 3-6 interests you have and want to pursue more. Do not censor your list. Simply file it. Repeat this exercise every 6 weeks for nearly a year. **DO NOT LOOK AT PRIOR LISTS.** At the end of the year, get out all lists and see what items endure. These are your true interests now. The rest are wishes that may disappear or recur. Treat wishes as hobbies or retirement activities.
- Very few people have few or no interests. Many have too many interests. You'll face the agony of choice. People whom others consider "bright" have the hardest time with the agony of choice. But realize that the agony is caused by the fear that picking one option will exclude another. This is rarely so. You can often relate interests (leadership and public speaking are two I combine with joy). You can simply defer an interest (SCUBA?) to a later time. Keep a lifetime list of interests to develop, places to visit, etc. Add items as they come up. Reward yourself by practicing one or more on the list at work, in the community, or recreationally. Try to have items left on your list when you die. Dreams are life's fuel.
- Combine your strengths and your interests. What activities in your current job call on both? Start here. If none, what dimensions can you add to your current job that will include your interests and your strengths?
- Volunteer for something new while keeping your current job. Volunteer to do something no one else wants to do. Some will volunteer to help you just because they now won't be asked to lead the activity. Take advantage of the desire of others to pitch in but not lead.

- Ask for help. You increase the nobility of the person you ask. Know who you'll approach before you volunteer, and you're more likely to volunteer.

V. Support Your Leaders

- What does support for our leaders look like? Here's an unusual example:
 - We've all been there. We've all had selfish leaders who are stingy with recognition, and make self-serving decisions. A common reaction is to privately disagree with the leader, then withdraw support.
 - In a Hollywood movie a courtier to the king of Spain sees that he works for an imperfect leader. The courtier has a crisis. Does he leave, or does he stay and help his leader become a better leader (even if the king doesn't see the need for such help)?
 - When faced with similar situations, what do you do? Passive aggressive withdrawal is a common response. It leads to far more agony for the subordinate than for the leader.
- You can contribute to leadership from below. You're not powerless. But you must break powerlessness thinking. You're not dealing with an absolute monarch.
- Help leaders craft messages that engage employees. See purpose for your organization. Collect useful input. Volunteer to provide this input. Try this repeatedly. Note the reasons given when your help and ideas aren't accepted. Keep trying, and extract the lesson each time for at least a year. Transfer to another area if the burden is too great after a year.
- We experience leaders from the time we're children. Parents, teachers, relatives, older siblings, friends all take turns leading us. We also lead ourselves.
- Make a list of all the leaders you've had to date. List at least one thing each did well. List at least one improvement area for each. Note that all human beings are imperfect. Now rank the leaders from best to worst.
- Most lists will have three distinct groups. Leaders we enjoyed, leaders who did okay, and leaders we didn't enjoy. From the bottom of the list, extract the lessons—usually these come from examples of what not to do—then let go. From the middle of the list, note good examples and examples that guide you not to repeat these mistakes. From the top of the list, decide what to adapt for your use.
- Give your current leaders credit for trying and allow for imperfections (which we all have). Give up on them only in difficult cases. Give up only by leaving. Do not stay and undermine. The emotional cost for you is too great.
- When leaving good bosses, stay in touch. Develop superb former boss skills. Help them even though you're gone, by giving information, contacts, support. Enjoy giving without expectation of receipt.

VI. Actions For You To Take

- Don't permit yourself to even think, "That isn't my job." This limits your contribution.
- Avoid common pitfalls, such as always seeing self-development as taking a course on something. Courses can be superb, but they're not the only form of self-development.
- One of the best self-development tools is interviewing others who do jobs you haven't done. You're looking to understand the basics, and to see how what you do links to what that person does. Start by interviewing people you admire. Tell them in advance that you'd like to understand what their department does. During the interview let them know you think they're successful, and ask what they feel contributed to that success. Repeat the process in interviews with others. You'll discover a lot about how to succeed in your own work, or other work you may choose to pursue.
- Coach and be coached by peers. The sincere question is the most powerful tool of self-development. "How do you handle this type of inquiry?" is an example. Rehearse difficult conversations with colleagues.
- Does your organization encourage employee development plans? Have this conversation with your boss in at least two parts. First visit with her/him to say you'd like to build and implement a development plan. Be prepared to be asked right then, "What is your goal?" Be ready with a discussion rather than a demand.
- Do your homework. Goal clarification, interviews, even observation and new work experiences that come from volunteering are part of homework. Know your strengths and interests (see Part IV above).
- Have a second session with the boss in which your goal is NOT to get him/her to tell you what your development activities should be. They don't necessarily know. Present possibilities. Make requests where you need to. Make it clear where you're going with this. Be sensitive to bosses who are reluctant to provide support for fear of losing you.

VII. How Leaders Must Support Employees as Leaders

- It starts with ethics. Ethics involve right and wrong. There are a few areas where there is no gray, only black and white. Lying, stealing, loafing (stealing productivity from the organization) are as wrong when done by leaders as when done by employees.
- Check your values. "Values are beliefs held as truths." And we can choose from among a range of choices. For example, FedEx values employee development and growth. Another firm can choose not to develop employees and pay the costs that result from inefficiency, sloth, frustration, and turnover. Timeliness is a value. Boeing's employee learning reimbursement policy is a value. Chick-fil-A restaurants being closed on Sundays is a value. Choose your values wisely. Communicate these values to new team members. Live these values.

- Respect comes next. Live it, and display it in every interaction with employees. Respected employees treat customers with respect.
- Respect leads to trust. Trust can only be given, never demanded. Giving trust leads to trust received. Respect must be its foundation, followed by word kept consistently.
- Trust leads to relationship. Build the relationship before you need it. You will need it. This advice also applies to employees. Build relationships of respect, trust, and word kept with colleagues, customers, and leaders.
- Have an organization purpose. See above under “Organizational Purpose.”
- Have an organization aspiration. See it in customer value terms. Know the customers you want and those you don’t. Communicate the aspiration, and how we’re going there to employees. Communicate the criteria for customers we want and customers we don’t want.
- Appreciate both employees and customers, in that order.

About the Author

Ken Graham is a consultant, author, lecturer, and leader. He has more than 25 years experience leading groups up to 131 people, teaching leadership to experienced leaders, and coaching individuals and groups of leaders.

Ken’s favorite professional activities include working with leaders individually or in groups, and speaking at conferences. See www.getenergyevent.com for Ken’s contributions at the Dubai 2007 event and London 2008 event.

Ken experienced command and control leadership in a steel mill, where being alive and uninjured at the end of a work shift was an accomplishment. He experienced leaders who serve and leaders who teach early in career. Becoming a better leader and helping others do likewise are the focus of his work. He finds the ground for such growth especially rich in the developing world. Ken has visited or worked in 85 countries.

Current and recent clients include Shell, Nigerian National Petroleum Company, Technological University of Delft (The Netherlands), Boeing, Bury and Partners, IBM, Motorola, and Intel.

Ken’s Ph.D. is in Strategy and Logistics from Penn State University, where he led Penn State Executive Programs. He has served as Vice President for Allstate Insurance, and most recently as Head, Global Leadership Development for Royal Dutch Shell Exploration and Production in The Hague, The Netherlands.

Ken has recently addressed conferences for GetEnergy, Limited, in Dubai (2006, 2007) for Management Centre Europe (2004), and for Petroleum Training Journal in Abuja, Nigeria (2006), the Southern Africa Development Council (SADEC) in Johannesburg (2007), and GetEnergy London (2008).

Since age 20, Ken has been a single engine airplane pilot. More recently he added floatplane flying to his license. Adventure trips have included Alaska, Yukon Territory, and Northwest Territories (to the Arctic Ocean). He owns a new type of short take-off and landing aircraft called a Savannah, which performs especially well in off-airport operations (think pastures, roads, etc.) See www.skykits.com for examples.

Working With Ken

Are you a program chair for a professional organization or for a conference that will be held inside your organization? Ken may be available to work with your audience. Expect participants to take an active role, to learn by doing, and to apply what they learn. Ken will provide copies of selected *Leadership Insights* as prizes for participants during his session. Session organizers also receive printed copies.

Visit Ken's website at www.kengrahamphd.com where you'll be able to view excerpts from *Leadership Insights* in the series. You can contact Ken at kengraham8@msn.com

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