

How Do I Convince My Boss That We Need Some Help?

by Dennis Hooper, copyright © 2013, published in the *Savannah Business Journal* on Monday, April 15, 2013

My new friend never asked that question explicitly. I thought we were having lunch simply to build our relationship. I quickly sensed, however, that he was struggling with this dilemma.

I listened as he described his organization's environment: limited planning, crisis management, broken promises, frequently changing priorities, knee-jerk reactions, and lots of second-guessing.

"We could be so much better" was his lament. His body language showed the tension between his desire for improvement and his hopelessness. "I don't know what to do. I don't know where to start."

I moved the conversation in the direction of "leadership." Over the past forty years, I've seen that the single most powerful leverage for organizational improvement comes from raising the skills and confidence of the leaders. Ah, but how does this one individual convince his boss to invest time and energy into what his boss probably considers "soft" skills?

I offered some ideas. Through this article, I share four of them with you.

Educate yourself first. Insert "leadership" and then "leadership development" into a search engine. Find articles that show why improved leadership will enhance the quality of an organization's processes and culture. You'll begin to amass ideas for what might be achieved in your organization.

Start a study group. Go to my website (see address below). Click on the "Article Archives" page. Scroll down alphabetically to "Starting a Study Group."

I recommend using John Maxwell's *21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*. If you cover two chapters a week, you can complete the whole book in less than three months. (Note: The first law says that the quality of any organization rises and falls with the quality of its leadership!)

Relate each week's readings to your organization. It may be tempting to criticize the limitations of upper management, but be fair. Take an evaluative look at your own attitudinal and behavioral traits, too!

Ask your leadership team these two self-assessment questions. When you can, ask your colleagues to do some organizational evaluation. "What three activities associated with leadership do we do surprisingly well? What three things, if we did them better, would contribute greatly to improving our leadership effectiveness?"

Capture all six responses for each individual on the board. This is not "secret ballot" time. Each individual declares publicly, sharing his or her observations.

Once everyone's responses are on the board, talk about the statements. What common themes do you see? Are there some unique "nuggets" of insight that someone has shared? Have the group come to some conclusions about the current state of leadership health in your organization.

Now ask a follow-up question for each group. For the "we do well" group, ask, "How can we more effectively capitalize on these assets?" Get creative and stretch your thinking! For the "we could do better" group, ask, "What will be required for us to actually make these improvements?"

Ask your boss, "Do you lead leaders, or do you lead followers?" Be prepared for a look of surprise. Most bosses naturally think in terms of leading followers.

Then ask, "How would your life be different if you were leading leaders? In what ways would these individuals behave differently than they currently do? In what ways would you behave differently?"

These are not questions to skim over quickly. They are worthy of consideration by both THE leader and by the entire leadership team. You can hugely influence the effectiveness of your organization by intentionally building leadership skills into successively deeper hierarchical levels.

My expectation is that if you do any of these four activities, you'll shake up the thinking among your leaders. If you do all four of them, your boss will no longer be able to justify the status quo!

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