

New Year's Resolution: I Will Lead Leaders

by Dennis Hooper, copyright © 2007, published in the Houston Daily Journal on Sat., December 29, 2007

It's time for your annual New Year's resolutions. Will it be the same old broken ones from past years? Lose weight. Spend less. Exercise. Spend more time with the family. Clean the garage.

I suggest you give serious consideration to a major change you could easily make in your approach to work. This resolution could give your organization better results while making life more enjoyable, both for you and for those over whom you have authority!

"Not possible," you say? "Ah, very possible!" says I. Consider this idea. How would your behaviors be different if, in the coming year, you were leading leaders instead of leading followers?

No, I'm not suggesting you fire everyone on your staff and hire all new employees. I'm asking you to think about how you limit yourself when you presume that you are the leader and the people over whom you have authority are your "followers"—that these people "work for you." What if you started working for them instead? That is, you work to give them direction and to empower them to make decisions consistent with a clearly described vision of what the organization could be?

We humans naturally think in terms of opposites. There are followers and there are leaders. You are a leader, so it is natural that those people who look to you for direction would be considered followers, right?

But just for the time it takes to read this (and maybe a few minutes longer), think about how your behaviors would be different if you gave direction to and collaborated with "leaders."

I warn you, I'm going to mess with your mind a little bit here. But that's because most of the genuine barriers to your improvement are in your mind, not in your workplace!

Would you delegate more? Would you share information more freely? Would you work harder to understand their perspectives? Would you seek feedback more often?

Why would you (or anyone) want to do such a thing? How about for greater freedom? If you were to empower your direct reports over the next year, would they make decisions on their own that they now seek from you? Would that free you up with more time for higher valued activities?

Keep in mind that you'd have to give them proper guidance. You'd have to release responsibility to them gradually, as they showed they were able to handle it. But if you intentionally developed their skills and judgment over the next year...hmmm.

So what would be required to make this mental paradigm shift? Just because you started thinking differently, it wouldn't make them any more competent. Or more committed. Or more motivated.

On the other hand, you've read that people tend to respond the way you treat them. Are some of your direct reports frustrated because you treat them like children? How would you know? Would a couple of them who you trust be willing to give you some straight feedback?

Think back to some of your previous bosses. How would you have responded if there had been a step-change increase in the responsibility you were given? Would you have taken advantage of the opportunity, or would you have jumped at the chance to show what you could do?

Make no mistake—the transition won't be easy. In the short-term, it will be more work for you. For a period of time, you'll be tempted to give up and go back to the way things were. But if you stick with it, 2008 could be a great year!

Dennis Hooper helps leaders make the transition described in today's article. To talk with someone making this transition, contact Dennis at (478)-988-0237 or dhooper2@juno.com.