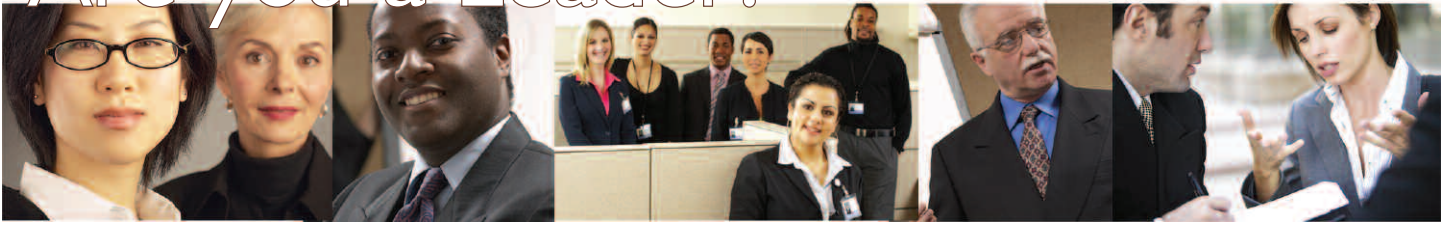


Are you a Leader?



Personal Connection is Key to Leadership Success

by Vanessa Lowry

Effective leadership is derived from a relationship based on trust, communication, understanding and connection. Increasing one-on-one personal connections and building lasting relationships is the way an effective leader can increase success and transition into inspirational leadership. The opportunity to establish a connection with another individual presents itself every day in places such as face-to-face meetings, individual phone calls, e-mail, personal letters and handwritten notes. Great leaders know that as opportunities are seized and a professional, lasting impression is made, a personal connection can be the beginning of a life-long relationship.

Handwritten notes have been proven to trigger an emotional connection between the writer and recipient.

The act of taking the time to write a personalized note places this “*small thing*” into the “*high return*” category. All great leaders take the time to recognize individuals for even the smallest achievement, progress or contribution. The act of communicating through handwritten notes ranks high on the list of habits identified by successful leaders and communicators.

Read on to see how a few words in a personal handwritten note can increase your one-on-one connections, build your relationships and benefit your company’s environment.

In Mark Sanborn’s book, “*You Don’t Need a Title to be a Leader*”, he talks about the power of a few words. **“Words have the extraordinary power to change our thinking, our emotions, to affect our attitudes and alter results. People who act as leaders in their life understand what a big difference even a few small words can make in reaching out to others.”**

During Jack Welch’s forty-year career at General Electric, he led the company to success in multiple markets and shared his vision for the organization through hands-on leadership. His management style became a standard to be emulated in business with a focus on people, teamwork and profits. One of the ways he motivated and encouraged the individuals in his organization was through handwritten notes to people at all levels of the company. An article in a 1998 issue of *Business Week* stated:

“Most great leaders, of course, are masters at communicating their desires. In his early years as chief executive, (Jack) Welch discovered that you can’t will things to happen, nor can you simply communicate with a few hundred people at the top and expect change to occur. So he doggedly repeats the key messages over and over again, reinforcing them at every opportunity.

Welch is uncommonly conscious of the signals and symbolism of leadership. Rarely does he miss a chance to make his presence felt. His handwritten notes sent to everyone from direct reports to hourly workers possess enormous impact, too, because they are intimate and spontaneous. They are written to inspire and motivate as often as to stir and demand action.”

An article by Nancy Sartanowicz of Workplace Strategies (YourStrategies.com) included this example of recognition, “*Dave told me recently about a handwritten note he got from a senior level manager. Dave had successfully resolved a difficult situation and the senior manager wrote about what Dave had done and how much it was appreciated.* **What’s so special about this note? It was written more than ten years ago.** *For Dave, this was meaningful and memorable recognition. He’s still talking about it and he still has the note!”*

The article went on to say, “*Now, before you dismiss this idea of writing notes because you are too busy, consider how many executives make the*

time to do this or something similar to give meaningful and memorable recognition to others. Our former Attorney General, Scott Harshbarger made the time to send handwritten congratulatory notes to his staff on blue note paper, which staff members highly valued and kept for many years. US Navy Commander Michael Abrashoff made the time to get to know each of the crew members of the USS Benbow, when he was commander of that battleship. Business journals frequently write about outstanding, high-profile CEOs who understand and act on the realization that their most important asset is their employees.”

According to the business resource, Measure-X.com, the two reasons people stay with a company are:

- 1) They feel the company cares about them
- 2) They feel they add value to the company

Recognizing people in a company for their accomplishments and reminding them they are valued is the key to attracting and keeping great people that are happy with their job and motivated to do well.

In a national survey on employee job satisfaction, income and benefits ranked fifth and sixth, in terms of importance.

Although income and benefits may attract someone to your company, these alone are inadequate to foster long-term relationships. The development of long-term relationships should be high on your priority list. Measure-X goes on to show how a handwritten note of personal recognition is a highly effective method of acknowledgement.

Tom Peters, best selling author and sought-after business consultant, calls handwritten notes “*the secret weapon*” of great management. He goes on to say that managers “*wildly underestimate the power of the tiniest personal touch.*”

Sending handwritten personal notes to the individuals you lead also sets an example for them to follow. Harvey Mackay developed “*The Mackay 33*” as a guide to “*know all your people and everyone will win.*” He shares his belief that “*everyone on the payroll is a marketing person*” and as such “*should send handwritten thank-you notes to their clients when work is completed.*”

Take a minute to reflect on the encouragement and inspiration you have received from leaders as you have progressed in your career. Steve Farber writes about Extreme Leadership in “*The Radical Edge*” with these two things you must “*be*” with total abandon to change your world: “*1) Be deeply fascinated by the life of every person – customer, employee, colleague – that your business touches and 2) Be deeply grateful for who they are and what they do.*”

And the key part of Successful Leadership is TELLING people how important they are to you and your organization. Develop the leadership habit of handwriting notes and increase your personal connections today.

Find out more about the leaders and resources referenced in this article...

Mark Sanborn, www.youdontneedatitle.com

Jack Welch, www.businessweek.com/1998/23/b3581001.htm

Nancy Sartanowicz, www.YourStrategies.com

www.measure-x.com/measurex%20backup/tips/employee%20turnover.html

Tom Peters, www.tompeters.com

Harvey Mackay, www.harveymackay.com

Steve Farber, www.stevefarber.com

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