

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



437 Is it Time to “Unboss” Your Organization?

The future of leadership is at a critical juncture and needs to change, so says the CEO of pharmaceutical giant Novartis, who says he wants to “unboss” companies by reinventing outdated management hierarchies. I’m Jerry Roberts and today, just days away from the 2019 Live2Lead Guam conference, we look at unbossing. That’s up next on The Extra Point.

“The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve.” That’s from the Bible in Mark, chapter 10, verse 45. This may be the first documented case of what we’ve come to know as servant leadership. Jesus empowered 12 men to carry his message to the masses and — other than one notable administrative problem, the rest took on the system and made it work well.

Speaking recently at the One Young World conference in London, Novartis CEO Vasant Narasimhan urged future leaders to stay grounded as they are given more authority. He said: “Leadership is not a right, it’s not a rank — it’s something that you earn every single day.”

Narasimhan said the corporate world is slowly learning the wisdom of ancient societies” noting that many big firms were built during a different time and had been slow to adapt to a changing workforce. He said traditional attitudes toward management were from a bygone era and need an overhaul. What he favors is a model based on servant leadership.

This is where you flip the traditional org chart upside down. In the normal model all the glory, all the benefits, and all the power flows to the top, resting in the hands of very few people. In smaller organizations, perhaps just one. In Narasimhan’s idea of “unbossing,” servant leaders focus on the needs of the people who report directly to them. If we help them become successful, and then they, in turn, help those who report to them to be successful, on it goes and the business as a whole benefits.

He reported that Novartis was on a journey to unboss itself and become less hierarchical. He said we can’t manage knowledge workers the same way we did when everybody toiled in a factory. This is the contention of the majority of Millennials and Generation Z workers.

Narasimhan recognizes the challenges and often outright futility in trying to squeeze these groups into the traditional model. They reject it and they end up leaving.

“The source of power for a leader is your ability to create opportunities for the people around you,” he said. This plays to the concept that everybody is tuned into the most powerful radio station in the world and I’ve been barking out its call letter for years. With all due respect to The Point, the most powerful station in the world is WII-FM, and it’s right here in Guam. In fact, it’s everywhere. WII-FM. What’s In It For Me.

When tuned into it I’m saying, “I’ll follow you if I like your ideas and values, but it’s also got to pay off for me.” That might mean a greater share of the power, freedom to make more decisions, or maybe a voice in the direction of the organization. John Maxwell says the first job of a leader is to create more leaders, and this is what Narasimhan has in mind for Novartis.

While the company had initial thoughts to train the top 350 leaders in this new initiative, now they’re rolling it out to all 12,000 managers worldwide. Servant leadership isn’t new and it takes getting used to, but the benefits are there.

That’s The Extra Point. Get out there and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I’m Jerry Roberts.

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