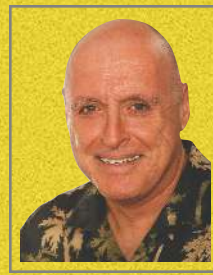


THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



761 Get Inside the World of Your Followers

If you're a leader, when is the last time you took on the role of a follower? If it's been a while, do you think that could be a problem? Do you think you might learn something? Today, I'll tell you the story of someone who did and that's next, on The Extra Point.

Someone once told me that the best leaders are those who were the best followers. They never forgot the ups and downs, the good and the bad about followership.

Because they never forgot what life was like before they took on the leadership role, they were extremely careful to treat front line workers well. In return, workers delivered higher engagement and greater productivity.

The story I referred to takes place at San Francisco's St. Francis Hotel, the most famous hotel in that city's history, known for serving an elite clientele.

I believe it was in the early 1990s when the general manager, I don't have his name, learned there were some issues being voiced by his team of bellmen. A bellman, otherwise known as *bellhop*, assists guests in moving their luggage into and out of the hotel.

The general manager wanted to know first hand if the complaints were true, so he decided to take off his suit and put on a bellman's uniform for a couple of days, performing every task in the job description. While employees knew what he was doing, arriving guests wouldn't recognize him and would treat him the same as any other bellman.

According to the story, he got an eyeful and an earful in his new position. Several guests were rude and dismissive. When this happened, he accepted the ugly behavior just as any other bellman would have to.

He also discovered that some equipment and

facilities had long needed upgrading. He was upset with what he had learned. When his stint with the crew was over, he initiated several changes that improved the conditions for the bellman staff.

It didn't stop there. He felt so strongly about his experience that he required his management team to do the same, to spend time doing the work of others, and then to suggest any desired changes. It became an annual practice for the general manager and his supervisory group.

My understanding is that many hotels picked up on the story and instituted similar programs. I've been telling these details for some two decades, pitching this as an opportunity for all organizations.

Do you know what it's like for most people in your company? Does equipment work like you believe it works? How about the software systems, do yours make work easier and more streamlined, or cause additional problems?

Have you put your workers in a position to be as successful as you've challenged them to be, or are your plans unreasonable in light of what they have to deal with? Do you know?

It may not be practical for you to put on the work clothes of other employees, I get it. I recommend it if you can, but it's rare for top executives to do that. If you have no interest in such an exercise, I suggest you an alternative, that you sit down with your team and give them a chance to tell you the plain truth about what they have to deal with, plus hear their opinions on how to make improvements.

Some of what they might say could cost a lot of money, some a little money, and some nothing at all. The free changes are low-hanging fruit, and you make those changes right away.

(Con't.)

The rest you can deal with as your cash flow permits.

The main thing is to get your head back inside the world of your followers, and to draw them closer.

When you implement changes they suggest, you're letting them know their opinions count. You're letting them know you hear them. The emotional value that brings is off the scale.

That's The Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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