
WHAT'S IMPORTANT | Volume III, Issue 2 | March 14, 2007

"What's Important" is a universal concern. The phrase resonates with an infinite number of meanings. What's important is both a question and an answer, depending on the situation.

Which would you rather do – look out a window, or look in a mirror?

Perhaps your answer depends on the view. But, according to author and management guru Jim Collins, the best leaders are those who make a point of doing both. They look out the window to find a place to heap praise when things are going well, and look in the mirror to take full responsibility when situations are bleak.

In an extensive five year research project, Collins studied American corporations to determine what characteristics helped move a company from good to great. Not surprisingly, it was the top leader who helped the company make the leap to greatness. But ironically, that same leader would refuse to take credit for the progress, looking instead to praise luck, a great team, or some other external circumstance as the reason for success.

Time and again, it was the workhorse, not the show horse, who made the ultimate difference. It wasn't the self-promoting Donald Trumps, Lee Iacoccas or Martha Stewarts of the world, but rather the hardworking, humble leaders like Colman Mockler (Gillette) and Ken Iverson (Nucor) who were able to make the biggest transitions for a company. They may not be household names, but during their reign and through their unassuming leadership style, their companies dramatically outpaced the competition. It was people who put the good of the company ahead of their own personal gain who helped a company reap the most success.

According to Collins, leaders of great companies possess the winning combination of extreme personal humility and intense professional will. They look out the window to give credit and look in the mirror to take responsibility.

What does that mean for your company? What does it mean for your middle managers or line workers? Is humbleness valued? Or can people only make headway through self-promotion?

Often, it's the more charismatic employees who win the promotions and get the good assignments. But, it appears that even charisma has its limits, and may actually prevent a person or company from reaching its full potential.

Does your company make room for both the window and the mirror? For humbleness and modesty? For diligence and accountability? For those who take full responsibility for poor results and are willing to give credit to others for their success?

If so, you might be making room for another great leader in your great company.

What's important is that giving praise and taking responsibility not only help build great leaders, but also help build great organizations.

Email me at chuck@durakis.com to share your thoughts.

Thanks,

Chuck