

Jim's Profit Accelerator 28: Are You a Lighthouse or a Light?

We often do one thing in theory, and something entirely different in practice. As leaders we may know it's more about our people than it is about us, but in practice it is quite another story. The hardest leadership lesson to stick to is that it's not about what *you* do, it's about what your people do.

Intellectual understanding is not enough for this one. Go with your gut, and then go with action. Here are clues signaling that you may still be thinking that leadership is about you:

1. You work hard on managing your time.
2. You work hard on all of your communications to your people.
3. You come to tactical plans session with goals already written out.
4. You master the numbers.
5. You "let your managers manage."
6. You avoid checking on how things are going, because it's upsetting to see your unrealized dreams all around you.
7. You really think that you know better than your people do.
8. You haven't read a novel or seen a play for more than a year.
9. Your advisors are comfortably familiar, and you're choosy about what you take to heart.
10. You try hard to do things well.

Each of those is more curse than blessing. As an antidote, I suggest you try these powerful reversals:

1. Work on your priorities for FIVE minutes a day, and the rest on your leaders' choice of priorities.
2. Listen more, talk less. You'll be shocked at what your people will discover with you.
3. Come to plans sessions centered and comfortable with your team's competence.
4. Charge someone else with predigesting the numbers for you, and show them how.
5. Ask your managers what they need.
6. Go see every day what's going on in your organization. Look everywhere.
7. Get over yourself. Your job is to enable your people to know more than you do, and act on it.
8. Expand your mind outside your business, with the same drive that you put into your success.

A lighthouse is often squat and plain, and close up it doesn't look equal to its task. "But," as Farnham Street blogger Shane Parrish said, "it isn't the lighthouse that matters. It's the light."

Are you so busy with yourself that your light is dim?

Here's an example of light that you can apply right now, from the September 1 issue of *Fortune*. It's from Regina Dugan, head of Google's ATAP unit (Advanced Technology and Projects), who describes her team as "a small band of pirates trying to do epic s**t." Dugan is fresh from three years as head of DARPA, the legendary Defense

Department research group that in fact invented the Internet, GPS, and stealth aircraft, among others. Dugan's team uses one of these two approaches to make huge leaps:

- Observe where technology is heading, and accelerate it.
- Find an application that needs a new type of technological solution.

Here's your version to jump-start improved performance in your teams:

- See where attempts at improvement are working, and speed them up.
- Spot an exciting outcome that could be within reach, and charge your best folks with jumping to conclusions until they find a way that works.

Or, if you like, take this leadership tip from *Sesame Street (Parade, 8/31/14)*:

Sesame Street's first guest star, James Earl Jones, recited the alphabet in 1969 in his characteristic slow, sonorous voice. The trick: Jones stopped after each letter, leaving space for kids to say the next letter.

Your version: Ask the first question, and wait, wait, wait, wait for your people to try out an answer. Reinforce it, and wait again. They'll see that you know they can do it, and they will. (The little help they'll need will come easily to you and will leave them with the thrill of leading the charge.)

Watch yourself: Are you so busy being the lighthouse that there's no light? That's a sure way for your projects and goals to crash against the rocks. Be the light, and let your people captain their own ships.

Call me.

For more information, visit www.grewco.com.

Jim Grew is an expert in CEO-level strategy and executive leadership whose clients refer to him as the Business Defogger and Accelerator. Jim helps leaders swiftly discover the hidden opportunities within their businesses and exploit them for dramatic results. Nearly three decades of success as a COO and CEO coupled with his experience running nine thriving businesses provide the foundation for his consulting work as president of the Grew Company. He presents regularly to industry groups, mentors business leaders, and shares insights on his blog, BizBursts.com: <http://bizbursts.com/>. He holds BA and MBA degrees from Stanford University.

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