

A quarterly publication service
produced by
LIVE Consultants Inc.

January 2008
Number 127



Career Development

From the Editor

I'm not sure who Albert Pine is or was (I rather suspect "was" because many others who have since died have quoted him often), but he did observe, "What we have done for ourselves alone dies with us. What we have done for others and the world remains and is immortal." In that quote, Albert has reminded us about the value of leaving a legacy that serves and responds to the needs of others.

His suggestion is as important for organizations as it is for individuals. Self-serving organizations die without a trace; organizations which do things for others — employees, customers, shareholders, and the community — leave something which is lasting.

As part of our strategic planning process with organizations, we help leadership teams define what it is that they want to do for others: in essence, the organization's legacy.

Marilyn Baetz, editor

About the Author and the Article

In numerous articles over the years, yes even decades, Stephen has spelled out the responsibility that leaders and organizations have to the development and support of others. This article looks at the other side of the equation: what responsibilities do individuals have relative to their own career development. Or, as Stephen suggests, "... the individual has a responsibility to 'bring something to the party' if they hope to be recognized by leaders in the organization."

In this article, he briefly describes 7 ingredients that every person ought to bring to the table if others are going to support and sponsor their growth and development.

Stephen is a principal of LIVE Consultants Inc., the organization which sponsors this publication.



Stephen Baetz

The Fundamental “Brings”

“I look for a brightness in the eyes,” he said. “Sometimes when you look at people you see nothing more than a dull glow and you know that person isn’t going to be up to the challenges we are going to face in the future.” The group of managers was stone cold silent. No one had expected that from a senior leader. Later I discovered that most of the group thought that in response to the question “What do you look for in future leaders?” they would’ve heard something like, “Someone who has a deep understanding of the issues facing the business” or “Someone who can manage profit and loss” or even “Someone who can think strategically.” But the answer was what it was: I look for a brightness in the eyes.

He went on to elaborate. “I’m looking for energy, a certain vitality, that will carry a person through when complexity and confusion may act to discourage many others. You can’t develop that.”

When I thought about it, the message wasn’t new, just unexpected at that moment. There are some things that learning opportunities (like seminars, workshops, books, articles, simulations, e-learning, mentoring, coaching, special assignments, temporary assignments, assessments, job shadowing, the list goes on) can accomplish relative to building knowledge and skills. However, the individual has a responsibility to “bring something to the party” if they hope to be recognized by leaders in the organization. When you recognize who you are and what you bring, others become willing to sponsor and mentor you. Such assistance helps you develop a vibrant career.

So test these ideas of what you need to *bring to the party* against your perception and experience.

Bring Energy

This is the brightness-in-the-eye thing that tells others you come with get-up-and-go oomph and that you will give discretionary effort to get the job done.

Bright-eyed employees need neither carrots nor sticks to get them going. They don’t wait to make decisions or take action until they’ve

seen the incentive plan, or reviewed the bonus structure, or until they’ve heard promises of what is in store for them. In fact, the opposite is true; when you just get at it and bring the enthusiasm you have to the responsibilities you own others catch the bug and join you in accomplishing what needs to be achieved.

Bring Willingness

Willingness is often in short supply and sometimes comes with boundaries and fences built around it — “I’d only be willing to do that if ...” or “I could but I’d have to be assured that ...” By contrast, a willing individual will try, test limits, or give it a chance without a lawyer-like set of preconditions or caveats. They sign up for a new assignment, a special project, a strategic experiment, or a trial. A willing person puts their hand up and volunteers for assignments that many others may not want to touch.

The willing gain visibility in organizations where it is often difficult to get people to step forward ... and that visibility can do nothing but help a career progress.

Bring A Positive Attitude

This is the complement to willingness. A positive attitude allows you to look at a situation and see the opportunities. A positive attitude leads you to say “Yes I will” or “I’ll give ’er a go.” Senior leaders who are looking for the next generation of talent, value that. They are tired of dealing with people who look at the obstacles and tell them all the reasons why they can’t or why the challenge is “impossible” or not doable.

Sure enough, attitudes can be shaped or changed but it takes a long time and, given the speed of change and the immediate demands to hit targets, most leaders are looking for people who come with a positive outlook.

Bring Resilience

Resilience is a typical outcome of both willingness and a positive attitude. If you are

able to bounce back after setbacks, if you have an ability to pick-yourself-up-and-dust-yourself-off and then carry on, and if you can recover with poise, you will be seen as an individual with career potential and an individual worth giving challenges to.

Individuals who take a long time to lick their wounds before they get back at it, are viewed as liabilities or (and this is a dreadful label) high maintenance. If a leader believes that what they will have to do is continually rebuild the confidence of an individual, there is a likelihood that a person won't be considered for future challenges. The leader will invest in the person who has bounce-back-ability.

Bring Curiosity

People with a low Curiosity Quotient are not likely to ask why or challenge how things are done. As a result they continue to do what they know and become excellent at managing the world that was. However, they are not able to see what is changing, why it is changing, and develop a set of strategies and tactics that prepares the organization for the future.

People with high CQ have insatiable appetites for knowing why things happen the way they do and how things work. They want to understand cause-and-effect relationships, what drives what, what the obstacles are to success, and what others are trying that might work in this situation. They understand that what can hurt them most is what they think they know but don't. As a result, they look for every opportunity they can to pick the brains of people who have different experiences from the ones they do.

The really curious individuals challenge what has been working for a long time and wonder why, given that conditions may have changed.

If you are interested in the issues of the business, inquisitive about how something works, and, at times, even a bit nosy, leaders who are tracking your career will view you as a person who will make change and not as a person who has to be pushed to do so. You will be seen as someone who can make a real difference to the business in the future.

Bring Aspiration

When you are in the early stages of your career, it isn't possible to define in clear and specific detail what all the stops are that you want to make. However, others should get the impression that your ambition extends beyond the next position or the next assignment. It signals that you are worth the investment.

Why is it important to aspire? In the simplest terms, if you sail through life without some defined ports-of-call, all the winds will be the wrong winds; you will not be able to see the opportunities that are smack dab in front of you.

Aspiration is the *wanna* factor. It defines what you want. It can't be given to you by someone else as in "You know what I think you should go for" — it has to be defined by you as something you desire ... because that "something" is connected to your needs, values, or dreams.

Bring Honesty and Integrity

Like all the other elements to bring to the party, honesty and integrity can't be taught. But if you don't have both, the number of opportunities you will have in your career will be few in number. Being honest and having integrity, means that you will tell the truth (as you understand it) in a way that is unadorned. Honesty requires that you declare what you don't know so there is no deception, misunderstanding, or unfounded assumptions. Being honest and having integrity means that you keep a promise and do what you say you are going to do.

The Deal

You can't make your career happen without the active support of the organization and other leaders. The organization has a responsibility to supply you with learning opportunities that will build your capacity. Leaders have the obligation to identify and encourage the best available. And the rest belongs to you and what you bring to the party.

If you want to get everybody on the same page ...



You First Have to Get Their Elbows on the Tabletop.

You can't do what you don't get.

Lots of organizations have good strategies. But excellence is in the execution. Every employee, every team, must implement flawlessly. To do that, they need to get the big picture. Everyone must *get it*.

Tabletop Dialogues

is an easy-to-administer learning process that helps everyone *get it*. As a result of participating in a dialogue, employees align their effort with the direction of the organization and are more change-ready.

Tabletop Dialogues

centre on a large information-rich visual that is placed on a table and explored by a group of 8 people. A facilitator leads the group in a focused dialogue and helps the group draw conclusions about the challenges and opportunities the organization is facing.

Tabletop Dialogues

start with members of senior management determining the key issues facing the organization. Hard data are assembled and transformed into information-rich tables, charts, and graphs that become incorporated into the visual.

Tabletop Dialogues

engage the hearts and minds of every employee in the issues facing the business.

In the end ...

Everyone gets it! Then the elbows come off the table and everyone leaves the room ready to work on what is really important to organizational success.

For more information about our services, contact us at (519) 664-2213.