

A quarterly publication service  
produced by  
LIVE Consultants Inc.

October 2006  
Number 122

# MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVES

## Leadership

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### From the Editor

This past summer we went Stratford to see a play called Ghosts. It was written by Henrik Ibsen, the Norwegian dramatist in the late 1800s. It is a story about a family that is haunted by the legacy left by a father. We never see the character. But his wife and son are shaped and influenced by who he was and by what he did or didn't do.

On the way back home, the conversation was lively as we attempted to unpack the nuances and tensions in the play. Of course we all had clear opinions about the choices that the Director and the actors made.

As our dialogue meandered, we couldn't help but make the connection to the organizations who are our clients. Many of them are haunted by ghosts and the legacies left by former leaders. Some of those legacies are helpful (an encouragement to test and experiment, to take reasoned risks, to treat others with respect and dignity) and some are not (command and control, distrust, blame placing).

That being the case, as leaders we ought to be considering the legacy we will leave and how we choose to "haunt" the organization for years (even decades) to come.

*Marilyn Baetz, editor*

### About the Author and the Article

Some of us have lists that we write down; others keep them stored in the grey ware between our ears. The items on the list vary: from what to pick up on the way home to what priorities to address, from what gifts to buy to what books are worth reading.

In this issue, Stephen shares two of his lists with us: one is 25 things worth doing every day and the other is 7 things a leader should do to make them worth following.

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



*Stephen Baetz*

# List We Not Forget

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I thought I had planned it quite well. The flight to Vancouver had given me just the time I needed to get several items off my To Do list that had been haunting me for the last couple of weeks. The final approach announcement had been made: chairs in an upright position, seatbelts fastened, and all electronic devices had been turned off and placed under the seat in front of me.

That's when it happened. I picked up the enRoute magazine and started thumbing through it. Page 55 had a article titled, "100 Things to Do Before You're 100." It did what any good title should do; it got my attention and it prompted me to read further to find out what the "essential things to do" were.

Get this! Spend a night at the Amazonat Jungle Lodge so you can fish for piranhas and eat them ... Switch to new world olive oil ... Browse periodicals at Universal News in Times Square to see six-foot something models shopping for copies of magazines they're featured in ... Get scrubbed within an inch of your life at an authentic hammam ... spend a weekend in Tokyo's chaotic Shinjuku neighbourhood to witness the brightest surge of neon lights ... eat foie gras every week for a year ... and the list went on ad nauseam.

Descending from 35,000 feet it was all I could do not to scream, "Give me a break!" The list was all about consumption, being where only the wealthy could go, or tramping to some exotic locale to see the locals in their zoo.

Surely to goodness there's got to be a better list of essential things to do than that!

As soon as that popped into my head I recognized that I had given myself a challenge and I began to scribble my alternative choices on the back of the airsick bag. Wheels down I had 25. But I was also addicted. I wanted to generate a list that anyone might do, leaders might do, students, professionals, front-line service personnel, teachers. I even considered lists for couples who weren't yet married, who never intended to marry, who were married for less than 5 years, who were married for over 40 years.

I recognized I was getting a bit carried away and that it would be a smart thing to do fewer

lists than many. So here's the list I came up with before we hit the ground. It's my *Things Worth Doing List for Anyone*. Of course, most of the items on the list are too valuable to do just once. The way I see it, a steady diet of these would contribute to good mental health. Let me revise the title:

## Things Worth Doing Every Day List

- Hold the hand of a person you love.
- Dedicate time to read.
- Do something to make a person with a mundane job smile.
- Read a poem out loud.
- Talk with somebody who is half your age and/or twice your age.
- Go for a walk.
- Ask a question you've never asked before.
- Wish somebody well.
- Exercise.
- Provide everybody you meet with the benefit of the doubt.
- Say thank you.
- Send or leave a positive note for someone.
- Listen for the meaning between the words.
- Laugh.
- Breath deeply.
- Remind yourself of the distance you've come.
- Enjoy the place you're in right now.
- Look for ideas that are different than your own.
- Treat others as *they* would like to be treated.
- Sing.
- Share what you're thinking and feeling.
- Write a paragraph or a stanza.
- Listen to music.
- Find an idea worth thinking more about.
- Stretch.

Those were the first 25. Notice that most are free: no money down and no monthly payment. They are life's simple and pure pleasures. To do them everyday, however, requires remarkable focus and discipline as well as the ability to live outside of oneself.

While I was in the mood, I created another list for leaders. It's titled,

### **Things Worth Doing So You're Worth Following**

1. Know where you're headed and why.

Understand the realities of the environment you're in: its opportunities and challenges. Then given those realities, determine what you and your team need to accomplish. With that work done, you are in a good position to talk about the where and the why.

2. Regularly remind your team.

In the midst of major assignments or even the humdrum of the day-to-day, people can forget about what is important and why a priority is a priority. Leaders make meaning, they refocus their teams, they connect people to purpose.

3. Tell people the truth.

Be candid with people about what is in front of them: potential barriers to success, risks, complexity of the problems, and the amount of effort required. Don't make it smaller (or for that matter bigger) than it really is. Sugar-coating erodes credibility and people end up feeling like they got sucked in. When that happens, trust erodes as people wonder what else they haven't been told.

4. Challenge limits.

This works a couple of ways. When given a responsibility, leaders ought to challenge the limits they have been given. Doing so gives them real answers to share with the members of their team — which is far better than saying, "I don't know why that is the case, that's just what I've been told."

The notion of challenging limits works in a second way; leaders ask people to contribute more than they think they are capable of. It seems to me that many of the obstacles that individuals and teams encounter are

self-imposed. For example, "We've never done that before," "Nobody else has ever tried that," or "We don't have all the resources we need." The best leaders challenge those self-imposed limits and help people reframe.

5. Remove obstacles.

Leaders own the responsibility to remove organizational obstacles or to act as a buffer to some of the noise that can come from impatient or reluctant stakeholders. In some cases, they will open doors so team members can gain access to resources. In other cases they will act as interpreters and help others in the organization understand what is required and why the team is doing what it is doing. When leaders act as door openers or interpreters, they give team members space and let the members of the team get at the job that is in front of them.

6. Get out of the way.

Sure there are times when leaders roll up their sleeves and help members of the team "get the doing done." A looming deadline is an example. For the most part, however, they should step aside and let the people who are really good at the job get it done.

Getting out the way does not imply though that a leader abdicates, vacates, or evacuates. Disinterest is not part of the behavioural repertoire of a leader. They do track progress, encourage good work, and test the quality of what they are given ... at agreed-upon checkpoints.

Everyone on the team should be clear that the leader cares and is passionate about the outcome and the value it is creating.

7. Give credit to others.

Leaders tell others how well the team did. They paint pictures of what challenges were overcome and how members of the team each made significant contributions. They resist any temptation to stand in for the team and take the applause that really belongs to others.

# 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.

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