

A quarterly publication service
produced by
LIVE Consultants Inc.

October 2007
Number 126



Leadership

From the Editor

Susan Ertz was a British fiction writer and novelist, known for sappy tales of life in the country. She wrote about numerous female characters who were propelled from their sheltered environments into a somewhat hostile world; many were unprepared to cope. Here is one of my favourite observations from Ms Ertz: "Millions long for immortality who don't know what to do on a rainy afternoon."

Being remembered, by others, demands that we not only have fertile imaginations about what we want but also the willingness and energy to get out and get it done. Both are essential.

Part of what we do at LIVE Consultants is help individuals determine what it is they want and what they have to do to get it. From there, it is up to the individual.

Marilyn Baetz, editor

About the Author and the Article

Stephen has always been fascinated by words and their ability or inability to connect. This article is about little words that can make a difference. These are prepositions and conditionals. Although it may not look like it, getting your thinking straight on these small words can make a big difference as you think through core leadership issues. To use his words, "I'll even go so far as to suggest that if leaders don't get those small words sorted out and clear in their heads their effectiveness as a leader will be diminished."

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



Stephen Baetz

Small But Big

About a month ago, one of the executives I coach used the word *leal* in a sentence, without taking a breath, without missing a beat. To the best of my recollection he made this observation about one of the members of his team: “he’s *leal* to the core of his honest heart.” What was even more impressive is he used the word appropriately: Not that I shouldn’t expect that but the word doesn’t appear in The Canadian Oxford Dictionary and I think it is safe to say you don’t hear the word often. The last time I remember hearing *leal* was in a World War I poem by Rose Sharland titled, “The Maple Leaf Men” in which she pays tribute “To the *leal* lads and true who will see the thing through.” *Leal* may be worth bringing back when we get tired of using *faithful* and *true*.

What was interesting to me was how much thought I gave to when and how *leal* was used and why. I suppose I shouldn’t be surprised; after all, words are the basic units of interpersonal communication. They are one of the tools of my trade as I order them into sentences and then sentences to paragraphs, all in an effort to influence, persuade, encourage, win over, convince, and/or sell ideas.

A renewed passion of late is the power and influence of small words — often prepositions or conditionals — that can make a big difference in the understanding that is created among people. I’ll even go so far as to suggest that if leaders don’t get those small words sorted out and clear in their heads their effectiveness as a leader will be diminished. I know that is an odd bold-faced assertion to make and that, on the surface, it may seem a tad overblown but allow me to make the case. To do that, I’ll illustrate how not getting the “little words” right can have a huge impact on how you think and behave as a leader.

Responsible For or Responsible To

Being responsible *for* something implies complete, unconditional ownership. Being responsible *to* someone or *to* something suggests that you have a responsibility to

make a contribution but it stops short of taking full ownership.

When it comes to leadership and the relationships we develop with the people we lead, the *for* and *to* distinction matters a lot. We ought to consider whether we are our brother’s keeper (responsible *for*) or our brother’s brother (responsible *to*). If we become responsible *for* people we may be inclined to control everything so we get the outcomes we want. That mindset and the behaviours that go with it may snatch decision making from others and place them in a position where they can’t decide for themselves. The result is they become dependent on us and beholding to us. By contrast, if we are responsible *to* people we hold up our side of the relationship and allow the other person to make choices that are good for them. Our inclination is not to control but to contribute and to invite the other person to do the same.

In general, it seems like a good idea to be responsible *for* outcomes and to be responsible *to* people.

Working In or Working On

Most entrepreneurs have to figure this one out. If they decide to work *in* their business, they become an extra pair of hands that works day-to-day to get it done for their customers. If they decide to work *on* their business, they engage in activities that help to make the business grow and be stronger in the longer term: planning, developing the right product/service offering, acquiring the right talent, developing people, creating processes, finding enabling technologies, determining the best way to allocate resources, and so on.

Really, is it any different for leaders who aren’t entrepreneurs? I suspect not. Leaders in every organization have to figure out what percentage of their time they will devote to working *in* the business and what percentage they will dedicate to working *on* their business.

If a leader makes a choice to work *in* the business, there’s a greater chance that objectives will be achieved ... in the short-term.

However, in all likelihood, the number of quick fixes required and the number of times fires break out will increase: because no one has been working *on* the business. Leaders have to keep one eye on the short term (this will require them to work in the business, on occasion) and another on the long term (this will require them to work on the business some of the time).

Talk To or Talk With

It may seem like I'm splitting hairs on this one but it has been my experience that when someone says, "I'm going to talk *to* Pat about that" the intent is not to create a common understanding; rather it is to tell Pat what "I" thinks. By contrast, when we talk *with* someone, the implied intent is mutual understanding that will happen when both parties share and listen to one another in a balanced way.

Leaders who talk *to* people run several risks: decreased desire by others to think on their own, decreased buy-in, and decreased willingness for people to speak up when they have alternative points of view. The net result is that the quality of decision making decreases as does the passion by others to execute flawlessly.

Running From or Running To

This distinction ought to be made when considering a change: Are we running *from* a problem or are we running *to* an opportunity? Those who run *from* a problem can often find temporary relief but the problem frequently catches up with them in no time at all. Not only that, running *from* a problem is a flimsy motivation for making a change; those involved can't see that they are going to get anything more in the future than a temporary unburdening of a problem — no new ground will be gained, no new advantage will be acquired.

By contrast, when leaders ask others to run *to* an opportunity, the appetite for making a change increases and the willingness to do

the extraordinary to get there improves significantly.

Here are two important qualifiers: If the problem is huge and painful, people may be willing to make a change just to end the pain. But once the pain is no longer felt, they may wonder if the effort was worth it and if they are really in a better place than they were before. Likewise, if the opportunity is small, there may be change reluctance: Why would I ever want to put in all that effort for so little payoff? However, if all things are equal, leaders are well advised to make changes that help others run *to* the future.

If This Change or When This Change

If or when. During a change process leaders ought to be quite careful with how they use language. Everyone is seeking clarity about the future and they hang on every word, every nuance, every change in pitch, tone, or intensity, searching for some nugget that might provide insight, reveal a secret, or offer justification. That we already know. What we may not realize, however, is how important the conditional is: *if* vs. *when*. "*If* we are able to make this change ..." communicates that there is doubt about whether the change is possible. *If* sounds risky, tentative, unsure; perhaps even unwise. By contrast, "*When* we make this change ..." sounds like the only thing between where we are and where we want to be is time. There's a confidence in *when*, a surefootedness and, as a result, people are more likely to join you in figuring out how to get there rather than keeping one foot anchored in the past, just in case the proposed change doesn't work out.

Free From or Free To

Being free *from* something suggests that an anchor has been removed. For sure, leaders ought to free people *from* processes or systems that are dysfunctional. It is just as important to free people to take action. When leaders do that they create an environment which empowers.

Our customers have given us quite a reputation!

And that's not just because we deliver solutions that are practical, easily applied, and useful. Nor is it only because we provide the extras, deliver high quality on time, and create learning experiences that are involving, fun, and challenging. Nor is it because we have three decades of experience in this business that can be trusted. Although all of this is true.

It's because we have *a complete range of services* that help organizations develop their human resources into a major strategic advantage.

We are educators who

- *develop* comprehensive educational plans,
- *carry out* needs analyses,
- *help* others learn,
- *design* and *develop* learning experiences,
- *develop* facilitation skill competencies,
- *help you write* your own training and development materials,
- *conduct* assessment centres to select the best internal facilitators,
- *evaluate* the quality of delivery,
- *build* teams,
- *develop* strategic plans,
- *provide* 360° program readiness surveys, and
- *measure* results of development.

And we do all this with some of the strongest companies in Canada.

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