



# **SERVING AS LEADER**



**Chip R. Bell  
and  
John R. Patterson**

# SERVING AS LEADER

Great service can occur without great leadership. All organizations have those associates who work to give great service simply because they believe that colleagues and customers deserve their very best. But it takes the guiding hand of effective leaders to ensure that great service happens consistently across an organization, and in a manner that supports the organization's quest for a good reputation, effective growth and solid profits.

A point of caution: great internal or external service requires an organization that views its priorities from a similar perspective throughout the organization. When the leaders in one division have goals that conflict with the goals of the leaders in another division it is often customers who fall victim to the lack of alignment. Most organizations have end-to-end service processes that cross departmental boundaries, requiring synchronized handoffs. Without goal alignment, employees are left wondering why other departments seem to have little concern for delivering great service. The bottom line: align leaders' goals.

There are probably as many books on leadership as there are leaders! Most espouse similar truisms--walk the talk, hold people accountable, be clear about goals and roles, celebrate excellence, set a good example, develop others, and so on. We have chosen to highlight a few principles that best support helping employees deliver great service to colleagues or customers. This is not an exhaustive list by any means. Consider them Chip and John's favorite "Recipe for Great Service Leadership."

## Keep in Touch

"You can pretend to care, you cannot pretend to be there," wrote Texas Bix Bender in his book *Don't Squat With Yer Spurs On*, Bender was describing a vital feature of leadership: command presence. People who spend more than twenty minutes in the military know the power of command presence. Officer school candidates are drilled on the power and practice of the manner of a leader—focused, attentive, and engaged.

Command presence is not about control, it is about connection; it is not about power, it is about partnership. Leaders with command presence convey character.

Davy Crockett was a leader with command presence. "David Crockett seemed to be the leading spirit. He was everywhere," wrote Enrique Esparza, eyewitness to The Alamo, in a newspaper article following the legendary siege. Great leaders focus on being there, everywhere, not in absentia. And, when they are there, they are *all* there...focused, attentive and engaged. They hunt for genuine encounters. They also upset the pristine and proper by inviting vocal customers to meetings. They spend time in the field and on the floor where the action is lively, not in carefully contrived meetings where the action is limp. They thrive on keeping things genuine and vibrant.

## **Keep Out of the Way**

We use the phrase "keep out of the way" not as an invitation to hands-off abandonment, but rather as a caution to never use any more leadership than is needed. If we hired smart people, gave them solid preparation and clear assignments, they shouldn't need a parent to watch over them. Limited leadership is the foundation of trust building empowerment. "To succeed with empowered customers," wrote Josh Bernoff and Ted Schadler in their book *Empowered*, "you must empower your employees to solve customer problems."

Empowerment also means helping people "think like owners," coupling take-care-of-the-customer service with take-care-of-the-organization stewardship. That takes insuring everyone has the most up-to-date information, the best training, and the kind of inclusion that helps employees feel like insiders, not like mercenaries. It means trusting associates, armed with a keen sense of vision and purpose, to always strive to do the right thing. It includes sharing control, not hoarding it.

## **Keep Relationships Egalitarian**

Power-free is the essence of effective partnership. Partner-leaders create relationships that are vision-centered, not power-centered. Partner

leaders focus on support, not subservience; on commitment, not compliance. Partner leaders enlist employees as fellow alliance builders, working as equals for the greater good of creating loyal customers. The approach encourages employees to be partners with other employees. And, it arms them with the confidence to exhibit partnering enlistment toward customers.

Egalitarian relationships are ego-less. The focus shifts from “all about me” to “all about us.” It is a perpetrator of interpersonal strength to know we are many, not “on your own.” Great partnering needs broad guidelines that provide “solution spaces” in which to operate. It takes knowing that mistakes won’t be fatal; it relies on understanding that missteps in the pursuit of partnering with customers will be viewed as learning experiences, not handled with punitive measures.

## **Keep the Focus on Results, Not Activity**

Three turtles sat on a log at the edge of the swamp. One decided to jump in. How many are now on the log? Nope, there are still three. Deciding and doing are not the same thing. Until you execute, all decisions are just plain old intentions. Execution—putting skin in the game—is the true test of commitment. “I believe, I support, I approve” are all just weasel words unless they are coupled with visible demonstration.

Working with senior leaders in major organizations who struggle with the arduous process of becoming more customer-centric, we are frequently reminded of what our mothers told us about “the road to hell.” Creating a great, compelling service vision is important. Crafting clear, customer-focused service standards and norms is vital. Selecting people with a service attitude is major. Training people in how to deliver great service (or how to effectively lead those who serve) is crucial. Determining the metrics and indicators of great service is imperative. But, in the end, all the planning and preparing is “just getting ready to.” People judge your position by the one you take, not by the one you propose. Get off the log!

## **Keep Your Promises**

One feature that has been wrung out of the work world is trust. Trust is born out of authenticity. We trust another when we perceive his or her motives are unadulterated and credible. Think of the goal as realness-in-motion. Communicate your enthusiasm for the privilege of being of service to employees. Take a risk with employee relationships. However, trust doesn't begin with "kept promises," it starts with a leap of faith! Someone takes a risk that builds experience, which leads to trust. And, when an organization takes a risk with employees and customers, employees and customers typically respond in kind...and, their loyalty soars.

Service leadership is about realness, not about role-ness. The stereotypical leader gets caught up with looking, sounding and "acting" executive and employees get a message of "plastic power". Great leaders know humility bolsters trust. They are unimpressed with the trappings of supremacy and more interested in communicating an authentic spirit and an egalitarian style.

The trusting organization values generosity over miserly squeezing every dollar out of every transaction. This doesn't mean "giving away the shop." Everyone in the organization should protect and grow the assets of the enterprise. However, customers remember organizations that refrain from "nickel and diming them to death." And that customer orientation starts with how well employees are trusted by leaders.

## **And, Keep Jelly Beans on Your Desk**

"Jelly beans" is our code word for the sense of joy and fun today's employees desperately need. As customers aim their anxiety at the front line, employees need the bulletproof vest that can come from high self-esteem. Happy employees are resilient in times of chaos; courageous in moments of conflict. Sourcing an emotional strength that is bolstered by a supportive, affirming environment, they are able to absorb tension, converting it into compassion in arduous situations.

Be the ambassador of happy. Poke fun at yourself. Look for ways to shake up the place with quirky events, silly signs, and celebrative occasions. Constantly seek the means, moments and methods to convey

gratitude and encouragement for service greatness. “Thank you” are the two most important words in the English language. “Thank you” is not simply testimony to an occurrence but the conveyance of a feeling. It means communicating gratitude in a fashion that makes associates feel your authenticity.

You cannot give too many awards! Be accused of always being honest and genuine. Just because you happen to be leading the legal department or a group of super-serious accountants does not mean they are immune to a great belly laugh once in a while. Remember what William James said: “The deepest craving of human nature is the need to feel valued.”

So, there you have our favorites. Try them on for a while and watch the impact. Share them with other leaders and add new favorites. Remember: the number one impact on customer relations is employee relations. As a leader, your influence, passion and dedication to be being the best you can be will go far in creating a leadership covenant that restores the kind of service covenant guaranteed to turn customers into advocates.

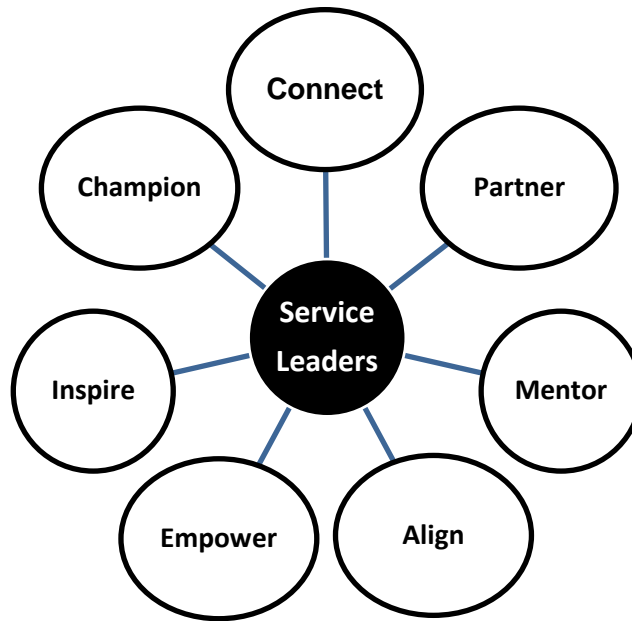
One final thought. We have chosen the image of a lighted match for this e-book cover to symbolize the role of the service leader. You cannot start a fire with a wet match. You are the match that lights the fire of passion and zeal to serve colleagues and customers. The flame has many meanings. It can light a dark path ahead. It can start a campfire and be a setting for valuable stories, warmth and joy. It is the symbol for the most important global athletic event--the Olympics. Be a lighted match to those you serve through the ways you connect, mentor, align, empower, champion and inspire.

# The Roles of Great Service Leaders

The behavior and practices of leaders can cause the spirit to serve to be embraced or resisted; held in esteem or rebuked as a frill; supported or ignored. Leaders who nurture people who serve need not be charismatic and charming to be effective. They must, however, be clear and sincere in the priority they place on serving well. They must be persistent in ensuring service quality doesn't get lost amid other organizational objectives, and committed to finding time amid busy schedules to coach, mentor and support peoples on the front lines.

Leadership, in our view, has little to do with being a manager, supervisor or boss – in other words, with position power. Great leadership can come from the security guard who alerts a plant manager that a departing, seemingly happy customer had disparaging words as he left the facility. It can come from the gate attendant who suggests that snacks be taken from a grounded plane to serve weary passengers holed up in a waiting area because of a weather delay. Or it can come from a battle-worn nurse who privately but sternly asserts her concern for a patient's welfare to a "too busy to listen" physician.

Effective leaders connect, partner, mentor, align, empower, inspire, and champion. They are the keepers of organizational values and perpetuators of standards of excellence. Leaders don't make great service happen. But they play a vital role in creating the conditions and providing the support that enables others to serve to the best of their ability every day. There are seven roles we've identified in our research that separate exemplary service leaders from their less-successful brethren, represented in the graphic below.



## Connect

Trace the origin of the word “rapport” and you will discover in its French blood lines the concept of kinship. Kinship is the experience associates get from leaders who lead with *realness* not *role-ness*. When a leader shows authenticity, sincere curiosity and appropriate vulnerability it causes followers to lower their shields and relate with openness. Good leader-associate connections pave the way for effective and enduring employee-customer connections.

## Partner

“Leader as servant” is a popular phrase that suggests leaders dismount the high horse of power. We believe “Leader as Partner” can be an even more powerful concept. Partner-leaders create relationships that are vision-centered, not power-centered. Partner leaders focus on support, not subservience; on commitment not compliance. Partner leaders enlist employees as fellow alliance builders, working as equals for the greater good of creating loyal customers.

## Mentor



One of the greatest gifts one person can give another is the gift of wisdom and support. When leaders function as mentors they nurture employee confidence through competence; employee resourcefulness through knowledge. Mentor-leaders understand the hard-won lessons and advice they pass on to employees gets “paid forward” when those same employees mentor customers – and eventually other co-workers. The more customers grow at the hand of a server, the more cemented their loyalty becomes.

## **Align**

Customer trust is built by consistently delivering on promises. When the customer’s experience matches what the organization promises or implies through advertising, prior service experiences or word of mouth, the customer comes to rely on service providers as trustworthy. To achieve such an end, leaders must ensure what an organization promises and what it delivers is aligned and consistent from location to location – and from server to server.

## **Empower**

Empowerment does not translate to unlimited license but rather responsible freedom. Effective leaders give employees the freedom to solve customer problems and answer questions on the spot within flexible guidelines. Customers use the level of front-line empowerment as a peephole into the values of an organization. The more they witness or experience employees who act with authority on their behalf, the more their confidence in the organization soars.

## **Inspire**

Leaders who inspire spur creativity and productivity among their associates. A major study done on the most productive research and development units in the world—those with the most patents and the most profound breakthroughs—found their employees labeled R&D leaders as inspiring. They did not mean charisma or charm. Rather, they pointed to

leaders' willingness to be bold in their decisions, courageous in their support, and ethical in their nature. Inspirational leaders cultivate pioneers—employees who think imaginatively in their quest to give customers one-of-a-kind experiences and plenty of stories to tell.

## **Champion**

Leaders who champion are quick to affirm and slow to critique. They know that the greatest need of human beings is to feel valued. And they constantly seek the means, moments and methods to convey gratitude and encouragement for service greatness. Leaders who champion also grasp an important truth: servers who feel affirmed and appreciated are more likely to elicit those same feelings in the customers they serve.

## Great Service Leaders Connect

“Doors!” the sound tech’s voice boomed. And hundreds of employees poured into the giant hotel ballroom. Room lights dimmed as the spotlights bathed the massive stage and accentuated its colorful, themed background. Appropriating the voice of God, the sound tech again spoke: “Ladies and gentlemen, the CEO of Acme Manufacturing, Jan Topdog.”

The CEO, carefully scripted through a teleprompter and supported by dazzling slides, detailed the financial history of the company and its projected goals. The scene was a carbon copy of a gazillion other big deal meetings held in hundreds of ballrooms around the world. But this one was different in one important way.

Without warning the CEO moved beyond the teleprompter to the edge of the stage, signaling a change in tone from pragmatism to passion. As the CEO began to talk about the power of the company’s vision and the value of every employee in bringing it to fruition, tears began to fall to the stage floor. Overflowing emotion necessitated several long pauses to regain composure. As the CEO’s speech concluded there was a long silence. The audience sat stunned by what it had just witnessed. Then they leapt to their feet for a long standing ovation. Even the “way too serious” sound technicians were on their feet!

It was not the tears that moved this audience. It was the CEO’s courage to be unabashedly authentic — to be publicly real, regardless of how others might view her actions. Whether the emotion displayed is anger, compassion, pain, or joy, leaders who are authentic create a more powerful connection with their employees, one that builds a higher level of trust and support. And when the going gets tough – when customers are complaining, overtime is required or budgets are being slashed -- it’s that connection that keeps followers firmly behind leaders when it would be easy for the troops to splinter and go off in their own directions.

Leaders too often associate their mantle of authority with a requirement for detachment. “I don’t care if my employees like me,” the swashbuckling

ruler announces, "I just want them to respect me." Such a view is often a preamble to emotional distance. Aloofness as the expression of authority invites employee indifference and evasiveness – a tendency to evade the truth or to cover up problems -- not enthusiasm or honesty. It triggers reserve, not respect. An open door policy is not about a piece of furniture. It is about communicating to employees that they can be open and "real" with you without fear of recrimination or judgment.

Organizations with an abundance of authentic leaders often feature high levels of employee engagement and strong track records of product and service innovation. Turnover tends to be lower because employees value environments free of passive-aggressive game playing, finger-pointing and posturing by leaders. Customers often stay in the fold longer because they trust what they experience. Suppliers typically give such organizations better breaks because dealing with leaders they can trust leads to long term relationships, not one-time transactions.

## **Great Service Leaders Don't Wear Rank**

Combat troops are generally better behaved in the field (where battle is likely to occur) than in the relative safety of the rear area. As an infantry unit commander in Viet Nam, Chip often wondered if that truism was related to the fact that military leaders remove markings of rank while in the field (so they can't be targeted by enemy snipers). This perceived flattening of the hierarchy takes the focus off of "whom" and places it squarely on "what." Those officers who resorted to barking orders in desperate attempts to signal rank often found their edicts sabotaged or circumvented by adroit foot soldiers skilled at deception.

We had invited a fellow consultant to assist us in working with the executive team of a long term client. She had heard us repeatedly rave about the CEO of this high-tech company. Her flight was delayed and the meeting was underway when she arrived, preventing us from introducing her to the audience. After listening to the group have a lengthy, spirited dialogue over a strategic challenge, she whispered to one of us, "Which one is the CEO?" It was the highest compliment that leader, who was fond of saying "never add any more leadership than is needed," could have received.

Leaders unconcerned with rank and power busy themselves with the business of mission and course, not might and conceit. The result is usually happier customers – and a healthier bottom line.

## **Great Service Leaders Care about Spirit**

“This is the best work I have ever done in my life,” said a colleague who had just completed a very difficult consulting project. Although there was pride in his voice, even more apparent was the lump in his throat and the emotion in his eyes. Chores extract toil, but causes unearth spirit. Real leaders care as much about the expression of the spirit as the quality of the toil. They see spirit as a light that can easily go dim and view their role as helping associates keep the rheostat turned up. They do this by constantly reminding people of the cause – “the joy of delighting customers and building repeat business” -- and by demonstrating their own passion for that mission.

Standout service leaders look for ways to connect and add value to every encounter with co-workers or clients. Instead of shouting an order, they inspire with a story. Instead of learning about customer experiences from a static survey, they find out face to face and ear to ear. Instead of being quick to blame, they assume the best and avoid hasty judgments. They are “myth-averse,” preferring to unearth the facts rather than rely on hearsay or innuendo. And their “up close and personal” approach usually builds passionate followers.

“There is more to ‘turning lemons into lemonade’ than just positive thinking,” says Dallas-based motivational speaker Ed Foreman. “Lemons take very little energy, but lemonade is a creation you have to work at.” When Foreman was scheduled to do an all-day workshop at an invitation-only event in Scotland, he arrived to learn the sponsor had been unable to enlist a single participant for his session. “Don’t worry,” the sponsor told Foreman. “We’ll pay your daily fee and expenses, and you can take the day off.” “Not a chance,” responded Foreman. “We’re going to call on your customers together and get as many as we can to enlist in your next training event.” The sponsor learned a great lesson as Foreman’s passion

and never-say-die spirit turned customer resistance into “customers registered.”

Margery Williams’ *Velveteen Rabbit* is a children’s book many parents have shared as a bedtime fairy-tale. The dialogue between the wise skin horse and naive rabbit contains great lessons for leaders. “Real isn’t how you are made,” said the Skin Horse to the Rabbit. “It’s a thing that happens to you....It doesn’t happen all at once, you become. It takes a long time. That’s why it doesn’t often happen to people who break easily, have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept.”

And so it is with leaders. Becoming “real” is an unfolding, accomplished in increments by taking risks, showing more of your true self and opening up to your associates so they’ll be more open in return. Before long facades are cast aside and more meaningful connections are made. And it’s only through building that kind of bond – where leaders and employees would run through walls for one another – that exemplary customer service becomes possible.

## Great Service Leaders Partner

An old adage states that “authority is the last resort of the inept ...and frustrated.” Parents who have found themselves relying on “...because I said so” to direct a reluctant child understand the truth of that saying. When rank or title becomes the primary means of persuading, one has long lost the battle to effectively influence.

In command-and-control or hierarchical cultures, influencing involves the simple act of giving an order. Obedient followers comply with little resistance, at least until they revolt, use sick-outs, or go on strike.

In more democratic settings, leaders resort to humanistic means to persuade. Leaders influence largely by *selling* – outlining the benefits of pursuing a goal. But these efforts usually focus on getting employees to change behaviors solely for the benefit of the organization, rarely on why such actions may benefit workers as well. To the rank and file, such persuasion often translates to working harder simply to line executives’ or shareholders’ pockets.

*Colorful communication* can be another powerful tool for influencing. Communication-dependent leaders often rely on their charismatic and forceful styles to influence. But if charisma were the sole prerequisite for effective leadership, organizations would hire talented thespians to run the ship.

*Role modeling* is yet another common way to influence. Leaders who “walk the talk” demonstrate that whatever they are walking should be emulated. But too often that results in leaders being placed on pedestals, which does little to bolster the self-reliance of employees. The longer followers rely on a “messiah-like” shepherd to make all of the tough decisions or solve all of the difficult customer problems, the further they move away from personal empowerment and accountability.

Finally, monetary and non-monetary *incentives* are often used as a means to motivate and influence. Leaders often incent the “good children” among

employees who act in sync with goals and their personal vision of how business should be done.

Given some of the drawbacks of these approaches, what does a leader have left in the toolkit as a means of influencing? Finding new answers to this age-old question involves letting go of traditional notions about effective leadership. It entails choosing *partnership over patriarchy*. When leaders begin to see their subordinates as fellow travelers on the same train, as “dance partners” in the act of serving customers rather than as foot soldiers to be commanded, it is only then that they begin to create commitment and not just compliance

## **Collective Creation of Purpose**

People need a constant they can count in times of massive change. That constant must be compelling and relevant; it has to be a foundation for everything. The flame most likely to evoke a sense of purpose or calling is an effective service vision--the picture of the unique service experience everyone needs to consistently deliver. The key to keeping the flame burning is to give every employee a match!

It's not easy for leaders, conditioned to calling the shots and charged with “charting the course,” to embrace the concept of a truly shared vision, one that is crafted and renewed collectively. It requires involving everyone in the dialogue about mission and direction – and more importantly, it means giving that input careful consideration.

## **The Power of Shared Legacy**

Helping people see the critical role they play in company success – regardless of their place on the corporate food chain -- is a vital role of any leader. For organizations with a long or storied history, creating a link to the past is another powerful motivational tool.

A CEO that we know addressed his Leaders this way during a crucial juncture in the company's life. “We stand today on the shoulders of the pioneering giants who came before us,” he told them. “They made this company what it is today. But you are the people on whose shoulders



others will stand in the future. Let us all make sure the quality of our work insures those who stand upon us have a sound footing.”

Great leaders don't let employees forget their corporate ancestry. Not in attempts to perpetuate a “we've always done it this way” approach, but rather to honor the emotional ground on which the organization stands.

## **Joint Accountability**

Partnerships are first and foremost power-free relationships. In the best cases, they represent a “marriage of equals” with each partner applying unique talents to the pursuit of a common vision – and all assuming accountability for results. Partnering by definition requires that leaders relinquish their caretaking roles and give their associates a greater say in decision-making.

In the late 1980s, Fred Smith, CEO of Federal Express, spearheaded efforts by his senior officers to capture a coveted Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. Knowing that the executive team would need to function as a partnership. Smith opted to focus on twelve critical measures of quality, rather than on the single “on-time deliveries” metric. Smith assigned each executive one of the measures to champion. So the head of human resources, for example, might be in charge of monitoring the “Number of Packages Pounded to Pulp” metric. If the company didn't accomplish its goals in all twelve areas, none of the executives would qualify for a bonus, which amounted to a significant percentage of their take-home pay. In the plan's first year FedEx missed a few of the goals and every senior leader (including Smith) pocketed far less than they might have with 100 percent success. In 1990, having learned a lesson or two about partnering to foster quality, the company took home a Baldrige Award. The performance leapfrogged them into industry dominance.

## **The Value of Bone Honesty**

In effective partnerships honesty and candor are viewed as tools for growth --when provided in the right spirit. Partners serve each other straight talk seasoned with compassion and care. Partners take ownership of their own mistakes, work to expose rather than cover up service

problems so they don't become chronic issues and give each other feedback designed solely to improve performance, not criticize personality or character. If a service worker is experiencing personal or health problems that affect his performance – or is having difficulty dealing diplomatically with a “customer from hell” – he knows he can be honest with a partner-leader about the situation and not risk recrimination or punitive measures.

Crafting a relationship built on honesty isn't for the weak of heart. It involves the courage to ask for unvarnished feedback and the skill to deliver it in constructive and compassionate ways. The truth may be hard to hear, but when delivered – and taken -- in the right spirit it almost always leaves partnerships stronger and more effective, as well as customers better served.

At its core partnering is a commitment to a dialogue rather than unilateral action. It starts with asking for input rather than offering instruction, and continues with enlisting others in problem resolution rather than positioning yourself as the sole “answer person.” Partnering is operating with the faith that wisdom lies within us all and that by tapping the collective brainpower of all associates, leaders can become far more powerful and effective than by operating on their own.

# Great Service Leaders Mentor

Mentor...the word conjures up a seasoned corporate sage counseling a "wet behind the ears" young recruit. The conversation would likely be laced with tips for navigating political minefields, passing on closely guarded secrets and offering "I remember back in '67..." stories of daredevil heroics or other hard-won lessons. The concept also carries ivory-tower connotations, leading us to think of promising young university students taken under the wing of pipe-smoking professors.

But what is mentoring, really? In simple terms, a mentor is someone who helps someone else learn something important. It has little to do with rank or level in an organization. Peers often mentor peers. Mentors are learning coaches...sensitive, trusted advisors.

But too often mentoring is restricted to formal programs characterized by monthly or quarterly meetings between mentor and protégé. While such programs are effective as far as they go, to have real impact we believe mentoring should be an everyday event in organizations. In the words of *The Living Company* author Arie De Geus, "Your ability to learn faster than your competition is your only sustainable competitive advantage."

## Partners in Learning

When viewed through a partnering lens mentoring is fundamentally different from the traditional, "I'm the guru, you're the greenhorn" approach. Mentors-as-partners means "we are fellow travelers on this journey toward wisdom." For example, one of the greatest gifts a leader can give a protégé is to position the protégé as his or her mentor, allowing the associate to educate him on best-in-class caretaking practices. But such two-way learning scenarios don't just happen. Mentors must take the lead in crafting them.

Mentoring is primarily about the transfer of knowledge... providing advice, feedback and suggestions for improvement. But when it comes to mentoring followers, such wisdom isn't always received with open arms.

Recall the last time someone said to you: “Let me *give* you some advice” or “I need to *give* you a little feedback.” You likely did more resisting than rejoicing; few of us find unsolicited advice easy to accept. Protégés are no different.

Smart mentors create a *readiness* for the act of mentoring. Protégés are more likely to embrace offered knowledge if it’s delivered in a spirit of equality, advocacy and safety – and when the follower has first signaled he or she is ready to receive it.

Mentoring from a partnership perspective entails four stages: 1) *leveling the learning field* 2) *fostering acceptance and safety*, 3) *giving learning gifts* and 4) *bolstering self-direction and independence*. The first two stages are designed to grease the skids for the main mentoring event...the third stage of gifting. The final stage is about weaning the protégé from dependence on the learning coach.

## **Stage 1: Leveling the Learning Field**

The leader’s first challenge is to help the protégé experience the relationship as a true partnership. Leveling the learning field means stripping the relationship of any nuance of mentor power and command. It requires creating kinship and removing the mask of supremacy.

The word *rapport* means “a bringing back” or “connection renewed,” and the figurative translation is “kinship.” The initial mentor-caretaker encounters can make or break the quality of the relationship; good starts impact good growth. Learning won’t occur until the shield has been lowered enough for the learner to take risks in front of the mentor, and such shield-lowering is expedited when mentors refrain from judging or lecturing in the first few interactions (as well as throughout the relationship.) Good rapport only happens in a climate of openness and safety.

It’s crucial that mentors strive to use welcoming tones and non-judgmental language in their interactions. Open posture, a warm and enthusiastic reception, direct eye contact, removal of physical barriers and personalized greetings are all gestures that communicate a level learning field. Mentors

who play the “power card” (peering over an imposing desk, making protégés wait outside their office, body language that telegraphs distance) make it difficult for any authentic or meaningful exchange to take place.

Simple statements like, “I’m here to learn as much from you as you are from me” also help to create a feeling of equality.

## **Stage 2: Fostering Acceptance and Safety**

Great mentors show acceptance through focused and dramatic listening; they also avoid “parental” postures, admonitions or tones. When it’s time to listen, leaders make it their only priority, committing to mentoring engagements only when they are sure they’ll be no distractions. A wise leader once said, “There are no individuals at work more important to your success than your associates...not your boss, not your customers, not your vendors.”

When a protégé needs to bend your ear, pretend you just got a gift of five minutes with your greatest hero. Think about it. If you could have five minutes...and ONLY five minutes...with Moses, Mozart or Mother Teresa, would you let a call from your boss, your customer, or ANYONE, eat up part of that precious time? Treat your caretaker spirit with the same focus and priority.

Good listening is complete absorption. Watch Larry King interview guests on his CNN show. His success as an interviewer lies not so much in asking tough questions but in his terrific listening skills. He zips right past the interviewee’s words, sentences and paragraphs to get to the interviewee’s message, intent, and meaning. The mission of listening is to be so crystal clear on the other person’s message that it becomes akin to a “copy and paste” execution command from one brain’s computer to another.

The goal of a mentor should be empathetic identification. “I am the same as you” gestures promote kinship and a “we’re-in-this-together” feeling that’s essential to building trust. Empathy is different than sympathy. The word sympathy is derived from a Greek word that means “shared suffering.” Relationship strength is not spawned by “misery loves

company." It is built, rather, through the "I have been there as well" type identification that defines empathy.

Mentors do not just listen, they listen *dramatically*. That means they demonstrate through their words and actions – by making a dramatic connection -- that the words of protégé spirits are valued and important. When people feel heard, they feel valued. Feeling valued, they are more likely take risks and experiment, behaviors that are is essential to stimulating creativity and innovation in organizations.

The bottom line is this...if your goal is to be a great mentor, start by using your "noise management" skills to block out distractions and focus laser-like on what protégés have to say about their experiences, fears, goals and dreams. Only against that backdrop can you craft the kind of customized advice and feedback that helps protégés grow and prosper.

### **Stage 3: Giving Learning Gifts: Advice and Feedback**

Leveling the learning field and fostering acceptance lay the groundwork for the main event: giving learning gifts. Great mentors give many gifts...support, focus, courage and affirmation. But none are more important than advice and feedback.

Offering advice should start with some statement of intent. It might sound like this: "George, I wanted to talk with you about the fact that your last quarter call rate was up, but your sales were down 20%." But it's essential that statement also ask permission to give advice; as mentioned earlier, nothing can grate as much as uninvited, "you need to try it my way" suggestions. This might sound like: "I have a few ideas on how you might improve if you'd be willing to hear them." The goal is to communicate in a way that doesn't make protégés feel small or incompetent. State your advice in the first person singular. Phrases like "you *ought* to" quickly raise listener hackles. By keeping your advice in the first person singular -- "what *I've* sometimes found helpful" or "what's worked for *me*" – it helps eliminate the use of the "should's" and removes protégés from the defensive.

While advice-giving is about *enhancing* existing skills or knowledge, feedback is more about *filling a blind spot*. As such, feedback can be more challenging to give protégés, since it suggests a lack of skill or knowledge, which is often hard for people to acknowledge.

Admitting to your own flaws or struggles with tasks or responsibilities can make protégés more receptive to feedback. Comments like “I have difficulty with that myself” or “that challenged me too when I was in your position” help protégés relate to you and open channels to receiving suggestions, rather than clogging them with defensive thoughts.

State the rationale for your performance feedback, and then assume it is *you* who is receiving the critique. In other words, deliver it in the way you would be most likely to accept it without getting overly defensive or prickly – be sensitive yet unambiguous. It’s important that feedback be straightforward and honest; sugarcoating it or telling half-truths does neither mentor nor protégé any favors. But frankness isn’t about cruelty – it’s about insuring the receiver doesn’t walk away wondering, “What did he or she *not* tell me that I needed to hear?” or “that feedback was so vague I don’t know where I stand, nor in what areas I need to improve.”

## **Stage 4: Bolstering Self-Direction and Independence**

Effective mentoring relationships are rich, engaging and intimate. As such, it’s often difficult to see them end. But like all teaching scenarios, it’s healthy for the protégé to eventually “leave the nest.”

Make sure to celebrate the relationship before it concludes. It need not be a big, splashy event; something as simple as a special meal together or a drink after work can serve as a meaningful wrap-up. The rite of passage is a powerful symbol in gaining closure and moving on to the next learning plateau.

Leaven the celebration with laughter, stories and joy. The protégé now needs your blessing far more than your brilliance; your well wishing more than your warnings. Your best contribution is a solid send off rendered with confidence and compassion. Letting go is rarely comfortable, but crucial to enable the protégé to flourish and grow out of the shadow of a

mentor...to emerge as a self-directed learner who one day takes a young employee of his own under his wing, keeping the powerful cycle of mentoring alive and well.



## Great Service Leaders Align

A crowded Montgomery, AL city bus stopped at its usual spot and a middle-aged African-American woman boarded the bus. As the bus pulled away, she realized every seat was taken and was prepared to take the trip on her feet. But, something changed that stance. Three different white men in three different locations on the bus simultaneously got up to give their seat to the woman.

It was December, 2005; exactly fifty years after Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat to a white man boarding the city bus near the exact same bus stop. It was a commentary on the unifying impact this “mother of civil rights” made through her non-violent act of courage.

Rosa Parks was a bridge builder. The daughter of a teacher, she was quiet, soft spoken and sensitive. Diplomatic by nature, she selected a simple and ordinary act as the underpinning for an important cultural transformation. When she was arrested for violating a racist law, she triggered a 381 day boycott by blacks of the city bus system. African-Americans made up two-thirds of the riders on the bus. The Supreme Court overturned the law and a powerful bridge began to be constructed between the races.

Why must leaders be bridge builders? Bridge builders are needed to repair the “dark side” of organization. Organization is the hand maiden of efficiency. Think of a world class pit crew. However, as organizations grow in complexity and when accountability and rewards accrue to individuals (and individual units), a crack can occur in the foundation of order. Employees start to view other units within the enterprise in negative ways—obstructionist, competitors, and selfish. The seeds are sown for the most insidious weeds of organizational strangulation—silos. At some point the sickness of silos overtakes the strength of their efficiency. It takes a bridge builder leader to resurrect the connectedness that is crucial to shared effectiveness.

Silos have many drawbacks. When work requires effort across departmental lines—collective labor or great handoffs—employees tend to favor their individual units over the union of the units. Silo interfaces can be like a conversation between two people who speak different languages--understanding often gets lost in the translation. Since many organizations compensate employees for individual performance (or at best unit accomplishments) other departments can be seen as “the competition.” Likewise, customers lose when energy that should be devoted to their requirement is diverted to internal spats and turf conflicts.

Rosa Parks’ actions can be instructive in educating leaders how to effectively construct connections between departments. In the countless eulogies following her death, we learned that she never wavered in her commitment to being a bridge building leader. Her courage was not the reflection of a single moment on a bus, but the soul of a person of true moral fiber. She was focused, sensitive and humble until her death.

## **Focus on a Higher Purpose**

The principle driver that fueled Rosa Parks non-violent act was her allegiance to simple purpose—fairness. “As coloreds, we were required to board the bus from the rear,” she would say in an interview. “Many times the driver would just drive off and leave us standing there. I was tired from work. I was also tired of being treated unfairly. I decided this time I was going to take a stand.”

Key to building bridges between units is to remind people of their collective purpose. When Ed Zander took over as CEO for Motorola their internal units were “warring tribes” fighting each other harder than they were fighting the competition. Units had conflicting products, unrelated strategies, and even separate booths at trade shows. Zander refocused the company to work together toward creating “wow” products. He also added a new company value—“I am here to win.” The result of his bridge building leadership was a far more integrated company; the payoff included a revenue increase of 25% and net income up over 50%. Customers today rave about their “cool” products and their responsive service.

## **Model Great Partnering**

Bridge builders understand the creative power of partnership. Rosa Parks did not protest in a competitive way. Her non-violent act was powerful (full of power) because it was power-free. Her focus was not on “oppressing white people,” it was on equality. She was not attempting to defeat racism so those embracing it relented or acquiesced. Her goal was to render it irrelevant by inviting its perpetrators to start practicing equality. Bridge building leaders focus more on starting interdependence than stopping competition.

The soft side of partnering includes keeping agreements, telling the truth, showing respect, and demonstrating a commitment to the relationship. It includes crafting protocols that insure understanding and minimize dissension. The hard side of great partnering requires valuing the whole as much as the sum of the parts. It means joint accountability must be embraced not just accommodated. It entails seeking metrics that effectively gauge collective toil. It demands candid critique of contribution and shared confrontation of the barriers to interdependence.

## **Focus on the Relationship**

Great leaders know that if they take care of the relationship, results will follow. “Successful partnerships are not built on deals and contracts,” said Marriott CEO Bill Marriott, Jr. “They work because of the heart and soul of the relationship.” Teams may merit from some fun-filled ropes course, but partnerships are spawned from hammering out the covenants that guide values and behavior, not just outcomes and results. The role of honesty, reliability, passion and support are as vital as goals, roles, rules and accountability. It means choosing a long term vision over a short term stance.

Relationship building requires extreme acts of empathy to turn suspicion into support. “You are not eligible to change my view,” goes an ancient Buddhist saying, “until you demonstrate you understand my view.” The “walk a mile in my shoes” philosophy calls for more than a tacit appreciation of an opposing view, but a blatant exhibition of empathy.

When Nelson Mandela appointed his enemy to his cabinet, he telegraphed such an understanding.

## **Create Settings for Interdependence**

The movie “Remember the Titans” was a study in bridge building. Based on a true story, Coach Herman Boone was the newly appointed African-American coach of a Virginia high school their first season as a racially integrated team. What was his first move as coach? He took the team to a summer football camp and made white players room with black players. While the community remained in racial conflict, the young men returned from camp with new bonds of friendship and cooperation that proved to be a model for their parents. They went on to win the state championship.

CEO Ron DeFeo assumed leadership of Terex Corporation, a large manufacturer of heavy construction equipment. The company was an amalgamation of several companies. Realizing the route to synergy included breaking down the emotional walls that separated them, he used a large company-wide meeting as one effective tool for bridge-building. The four hundred leaders sat as their old company in one of three sections of the giant ball room. He asked all three sections to shout their former company name at the same time. It was obviously pure noise. Then, he asked them to shout the new company name—Terex—at the same time. The symbolism of clarity served as a tone-setter for the three days of joint goal setting, joint customer strategy discussions, and joint updates on products.

Changing silos into alliances does not occur suddenly. The civil rights movement lasted decades. And, it was not a smooth transformation from a compilation of well-coordinated initiatives. It was a collection of quick wins from many isolated efforts. Great bridge building leaders are patient. But, like the leaders of the civil rights movement, they seize small opportunities to move toward a clear goal that never escapes their sights. They know that bridge building can involve two steps forward and one step back. Yet, like Rosa Parks, it begins with the courage and commitment to take the first step.

## Great Service Leaders Empower

Empowerment! The word is spoken with apprehension by most leaders. What races through their heads are scary images of “employees giving away the store” and “bosses giving up control.” Some employees want more of it; some want to be told what to do and not worry after five o’clock.

Every time we hear someone exhorting leaders to “empower” their employees, we remember Joseph B. O’Shea, the boss of Chip’s first full time job out of school. Joe was a crusty ex-union buster who had started out in the textile mills of South Carolina kicking butts and taking names, as he liked to say. And, many a fellow employee lost his breakfast worrying about an upcoming meeting with Mr. O’Shea.

One day Joe called a meeting to announce that the company was shifting to a participative management philosophy. The idea of Joe being participative was about as likely as Attila the Hun being compassionate. But, Joe was a very good soldier. If the company wanted people to be more participative, he’d give it his best shot. We were reassured, however, that the world as we knew it was not about to come crashing down, when Joe ended the meeting with: “Our division WILL have participative management. And, you’ll participate, by God, or I’ll fire your a\_\_!”

Joe’s heart was in the right place, but he completely missed the point. As leaders struggle with “close encounters of the empowerment kind,” there is potential to fall into a similar trap. Like Joe, most do want to do the right thing. And, like Joe, some risk missing the point.

### *Why is Empowerment Important?*

The world of business is changing...for customers, for leaders, for employees. For customers, their standards of what counts as great service are climbing. Why? Because they evaluate product quality differently from the way they evaluate service

quality. Customers wanting to buy a computer only compare it other computers. They don't compare a new computer with a new washing machine or fishing rod! But, service is different. Customers compare the service from any organization with ANYBODY giving great customer service. That dramatically raises the bar on the standards for customer service.

One element of this rising service standard is having employees with the authority to make a decision on behalf of the customer. The customer who just had a department store clerk make a quick exception to the return policy or had a waiter comp the dessert because of slow service, is not thrilled to then hear any employee anywhere timidly say, "I'll have to check with my manager" or curtly say, "That's our policy." Customers want an experience without hassle or delay.

The relationship between a boss and subordinate is also changing. The old view of leader as "company parent" has been altered to that of leader as supporter, coach, and partner. And, as employees demonstrate the maturity to effectively work with limited supervision, empowerment becomes a necessity. Most employees manage the complexities of their home lives very well. They're not enthused about then coming to work and having to check their brains at the time clock. So, what do empowering leaders do?

Empowerment is not a gift given to employees by leaders. When leaders ask, "How do I empower my employees?" you get a sense they're thinking of it as a gift. The job of the leader is to release power...to remove the barriers which keep employees from acting with power.

Empowerment works when leaders examine the work environment and their own practices to identify barriers getting in the way of responsible freedom. Below are four barriers which are frequent culprits in most organizations, along with a few tips on how to eliminate each barrier.

## **No Purpose**

Today's employees work smarter when they feel a part of an important mission. And, they make more responsible decisions on behalf of the

organization and the customer. When asked, "What are you doing?" the apathetic bricklayer stated the obvious..."laying bricks." But, the committed bricklayer answered, "I'm building a great cathedral." Purpose or mission provide employees a focus on the cathedral-building mission, not just the brick laying task.

FedEx chairman Fred Smith reminds FedEx employees of their purpose or mission: "You aren't just 'taking stuff by 10:30 am.' You transport the most precious cargo in the world--an organ for a vital transplant, a gift for a special ceremony, a factory part that may have halted a company."

What you can do? Talk about your mission often. Focus on what you want the unit, team or organization to BE, not just what you want it to DO. Communicate the "whys" when making assignments, not just the "whats" and "whens." Recognize heroes by "telling their stories"--especially the details of their accomplishments that are examples of the mission.

Walk the talk. Make sure your actions are consistent with your mission or purpose. Where do you spend time? Show excitement or worry about? Employees don't watch your mouth, they watch your moves.

## **No Protection**

When the subject of empowerment comes up among leaders, they complain that employees have far more power than they use. Get a group of employees together and they gripe about their lack of authority. Why the paradox? Empowerment (or lack of it) is often code communication for fear of failure...followed by pain.

Empowerment begins with error! Employees learn quickly whether they're empowered when they make a mistake. If the error is met with rebuke, it sends a very different message than if leaders see error as an opportunity for learning and problem-solving. Isn't it unlikely the person in charge of hiring employees said, "Let me see how many dumb, malicious, or shiftless employees I can hire this week!" Yet, notice how quickly an error-making employee can be labeled as stupid, evil or lazy...and, on whose watch?

Without risk, there's no learning, no creativity, and no motivation. With risk, there are occasional honest mistakes. It's easier to gently reign in an overzealous, go-the-extra-mile employee than to find one with an enthusiastic attitude in the first place. Empowering is trusting. The greater the trust, the greater the freedom. But, freedom comes with responsibility. The leader's job is to coach employees to feel more and more comfortable with more and more responsibility.

What you can do? Examine procedures. Employees may feel unprotected due to past practice. Are employees clear on what's a "thou shalt not..." law versus what's an "it would be better if you didn't..." guideline? Recall a time an employee made an honest mistake. Was forgiveness spoken, or just implied? Are employees publicly given the benefit of the doubt? Do they get more coaching or more critiquing? How many times do employees get praised for excellent efforts that failed to work? Are employees commended for seeking assistance from others, including other leaders?

## **No Permission**

Employees need guidelines, not unlimited license. The leader who says, "Just go do whatever you think is best," is probably demonstrating abdication, not empowerment. But, guidelines need elbow room for the employee to adapt to the situation and customer. Customers don't want uniformity in service. While they want consistency, they also want to be treated unique. This requires front-line flexibility.

It's dangerous to assume employees will just know what they are and are not allowed to do--or even that they'll believe you the first time you say, "Yes, you can." Employees have probably been hearing 'no' for a long time. Empowerment takes some getting used to--for leaders and employees.

What you can do? Take to heart a line on the menu of McGuffey's Restaurants: "The answer is 'yes,' what's the question?" Apply that kind of attitude to your employees. Examine your reward and recognition practices. Which is more valued: creativity or compliance? Being resourceful or being always right? Who gets praised or promoted--and for



what? Apply the “zero-based” budgeting concept to rules. If you eliminated ALL the rules and policies, and then added back only those absolutely relevant, would you be writing restrictions long into the night?

## **No Proficiency**

“Knowledge is power,” said philosopher Francis Bacon. The capacity to find clever, resourceful, and creative solutions is the mark of a wise person prepared and empowered to go beyond the traditional, and the ordinary. Training your employees, not once but constantly, provides wisdom, not just competence. And whereas competence promotes confidence, wisdom fosters power.

Building competence also means sharing information about the organization. If you want employees to focus on long term relationships with customers (and not be completely preoccupied with the transaction cost of each encounter) they need big picture direction and details about the balance sheet. If you want employees to make front-line decisions like owners, they need the benefit of “owner-type information.”

Empowerment is earned through knowledge. Early on there’s frustration as employees want to start ‘running things’ and ‘don’t know what they don’t know.’ The leader has to take the time to ‘grow’ employees. This takes openness so both parties can ask questions, discuss issues and share thoughts. Unless it’s a crisis, the employee needs the chance to work through issues and learn from experience.”

What you can do? Emphasize proficiency by recognizing employees whose performance stands out. Use them as mentors of others. Allow time in meetings for employees to share key learning’s. Be a lifelong learner yourself. Your example is one that employees will follow. Build a folklore of empowerment stories that communicate: (1) empowered actions should be taken, and (2) examples of how it’s done.

### *What are the Cautions?*

Empowerment is a never ending journey. Often, leaders feel impatient with how long it takes. There is a great temptation to revert back to just

telling employees what to do and how to do it. Don't give in to it. As employees learn the business, leaders will feel more comfortable entrusting them with decisions and letting go. Customers will be more satisfied and employees more well rounded, managers more able to focus on bigger picture issues, and the journey becomes a worthwhile trip.

Employees also have their challenges with empowerment. Overzealous front-line employees can make decisions without the experience or competence to do so. Again, it requires patience for both manager and employee. On the flip side, some employees may not grab the brass "E" ring as rapidly as managers would like. It can seem a lot safer to just "do what you're told," especially if the employee has been burned in the past for initiative that didn't pan out. Employees need to learn through experience that mistakes are tools for growth, not traps for punishment.

As long as organizations have people at different levels, empowerment will be a challenge. The wise leader recognizes the enormous power which can be harnessed when barriers to responsible freedom are eliminated and employees are encouraged to think like owners. Morale climbs, burnout is reduced, leaders feel responsibility shared, and profits soar as customers rave about the organization full of value, joy...and, power!

## Great Service Leaders Inspire

Picture this. You walk out of the airport to take a taxi cab to the hotel. The taxi driver has a sullen look, seems completely disinterested in you, plays music you dislike, and talks to his buddies on his phone all the way. When you arrive at the hotel and ask for a receipt, he acts like he's doing you a big favor and then frowns at the tip!

Now substitute the taxi driver for any one of your employees. Do you have employees who seem to hate work, drag through the day like they are barely alive, show the enthusiasm of a tree stump, talk to their buddies while ignoring customers, and then get irritated when there is no raise?

Mediocrity can usurp the energy from passion and the opportunity from initiative. Leaders who tolerate mediocrity signal that their real standards are much lower than what they generally state. Organizations can in fact be populated by ONLY winners. The proverbial bell shaped curve of performance---that there will always a small percentage of superstars and an equal number who do just enough to get by--is neither an organizational necessity nor statistical requirement.

The leadership antidote to passion-free mediocrity may not be to change employees or telegraph your displeasure or even "crack the whip." Your employees may simply need to be inspired. And, one of the key roles of a leader is to provide inspiration—to be a fire starter, igniting passion and commitment.

Let's revisit the taxi driver. We have discovered that passengers can inspire drivers to give consistently great customer service. It works like this. The first step is your own Animation—choosing to demonstrate the attitude you seek from the driver. Next, as you board the taxi, sincerely express you're Appreciation ("Thank you for being my driver."). Tell the driver your destination and ask if he knows the location. When he says he does, deliver Affirmation ("Terrific, I am dealing with a true professional."). The final part is a bit delicate. Validation is helping the driver view his role in a larger light than just driving a taxi. Keep it upbeat and optimistic. ("You have probably helped a lot of people as a driver, haven't you?").

Upon arrival, extend your hand for a handshake and then ask for a receipt. You'll be amazed at how many fires you can start.

## **Animation: Inspiring through Modeling**

Animation is "the process of bringing to life." We watch cartoons and are awed by the skill of the artist who can transform stills into life-like characters. The late Chuck Jones, creator of such famous cartoon characters as Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, Wile E. Coyote, and Road Runner, wrote: "The secret to making a character come alive is not how you draw that particular character. It happens when everything in the frame moves with the character."

Leaders who are fire starters start by choosing to *insert* employee inspiration instead of seething about its absence. Like the cartoonist, they do this by illustrating enthusiasm. They make "everything in the frame," including their own attitude, "move with the employee." They strive to be the inspired role model they want employees to emulate. Davy Crockett was an inspirer at the siege of The Alamo in 1836. Colonel Jim Bowie wrote in a letter to Governor Henry Smith, "David Crockett has been *animating* the men to do their duty." Remember: it is impossible to light a fire with a wet match!

## **Appreciation—Inspiring with Gratitude**

"Thank you" is a phrase we all enjoy hearing. Most people do not hear it enough. However, instead of just saying the words, take one more step. Let the person know exactly what he or she did that warranted your gratitude. When we were eating at a restaurant our waiter had on a name tag plus an additional tag proclaiming him to be the "employee of the month." "Congratulations," one of us said. "What did you do to warrant such an honor?" The waiter stood quietly and then said flatly, "I guess it was my turn." He had no idea what he had done to be recognized so he knew of no special action he was being encouraged to repeat.

A few years ago we were consulting with a successful company whose average non-supervisory professional employee was 27-years-old and earned about \$100,000 a year! Most were highly driven, Ivy League

college-educated go-getters. Yet, an employee-attitude survey revealed they regarded themselves as under rewarded. At first we thought we were dealing with spoiled brats who had no idea how the real world worked. But we were wrong. "We know we are very well compensated," they told us. "We just do not feel valued and recognized for what we do!" They were living examples of Psychologist William James observation, "The deepest principle of human nature is the craving to be appreciated."

## **Affirmation---Inspiring with Confidence**

"Treat a man as he is, and he will remain as he is. Treat a man as he could be, and he will become what he should be," wrote Ralph Waldo Emerson.

One of the single most powerful phenomenon in human behavior is the self-fulfilling prophesy (also called the Pygmalion effect). Little is really known about why it works as it does. However, your belief in your employees, demonstrated in behavior and attitude, has a major impact on their behavior. If you believe a person is going to be a winner and you treat them that way, they generally do not disappoint you. If you believe a person is going to be a loser, and you treat them that way, they generally do not disappoint you. It suggests it is important how you communicate expectations through your actions.

Even your tone of voice and emphasis on key words can impact what they hear and therefore interpret. Think of the line: "I think Bill can do it." Read the line six times, each time verbally emphasizing a different word in the sentence and notice how it alters the meaning. This does not mean you have to censure every word you utter. It simply illustrates the power of tone that reflects an attitude.

## **Validation—Inspiring with Purpose**

This is the trickiest part. Leaders can change the content by expanding the context. That this means is moving from specific to general can help someone view their world in a more optimistic, hopeful light. This is a technique parents use to get a child out of a pessimistic view. It is the positive version of "Well, you *could* be starving in Africa." Susie comes home fussing that Johnny is teasing her. Her mother coaches her that

Johnny doesn't realize how very special she really is. The intent is elevating the focus to a grander, more glorious view.

Judy and Jane were working together in New York City and checked into a mid-town hotel one evening. However, their approaches to check-in were completely different. Judy warmly approached the desk clerk with a Steinway smile and a jovial disposition. She made complimentary small talk with the desk clerk, making certain to use the desk clerk's name which she eyeballed on his uniform jacket. Jane took a more somber route with the desk clerk at the other end of the front desk counter. Without a greeting, she put her credit card on the counter, filled out the paperwork in silence and departed with a room key.

The plan was for the two women to go to their respective rooms, drop their luggage and then rendezvous in Judy's room to go out for dinner. But, when Jane entered Judy's room she was stunned. Judy had a suite four times the size of Jane's typical hotel room, plus it had a great view of Central Park.

"How did you get this big suite?" Jane inquired of her colleague. Judy humbly responded, "I wanted more than a typical room. I knew the front desk clerk really wanted me to have it; I just needed to inspire him." But, the story did not end there. When the two women returned from dinner, Judy's message light was on. It was the front desk clerk who had called to make sure her suite was satisfactory. Jane's message light was not on!

Inside every employee is passion waiting to be ignited; excellence ready to be released. Strike your leadership match—animation, appreciation, affirmation and validation—and be warmed by the results.

## Great Service Leaders Champion

He was a terminally ill ten-year-old boy, but he had a Steinway smile and an invitational attitude. His malady had left him completely blind for the previous two years.

"You gotta meet this kid," the hospital administrator announced to a visiting colleague while they were together making hospital rounds. She briefly outlined the boy's prognosis as the two approached his hospital room.

"How's it going?" asked the hospital administrator as they drew closer to the boy's bed. "If I were a kitten, I'd be purring!" he said. His giant laugh shot out of the room and landed half-way down the long corridor.

"Are they treating you okay?" the visitor asked, trying to get a handle on this awesome bundle of joy patiently waiting to die. "You bet. They make me feel purple," he responded.

"Purple?" the visitor queried. "Yes, they tell me neat stories, they listen to all my questions, they get me what I need...and, then they give me a big hug. It makes me feel like a prince—all purple!"

Great leaders are purple makers. They know there is a straight line between how employees feel and how they make customers feel or how much passion is put into their work. A leader cannot "make" someone feel a particular way. As Eleanor Roosevelt once said, "No one makes you feel inferior without your permission." She could have substituted any emotion (happy, sad, excited, or apathetic) for the word "inferior." But, leaders can influence how employees chose to feel exactly in the fashion outline by the junior philosopher.

### **"They tell me neat stories..."**

Great leaders are story tellers. They recognize that traditions, values and beliefs are communicated through anecdotes. While the communication

today is fast, furious and oftentimes overheated through e-mails, the present atmosphere of tribe and the future awareness of legacy are still both accomplished through the retelling of stories.

Stories telegraph a set of norms unique to the organization. When Southwest Airlines employees tell of retired CEO Herb Kelleher hiding in the luggage bin to scare passengers as they entered the plane, they are REALLY saying, "We are supposed to have fun." When Marriott leaders tell of founder J. Willard Marriott noticing customers buying sandwiches at his restaurant near the D.C. airport to eat on the plane and then his starting the first meal catering service to the airlines, they are really saying "Take care of customers and look for opportunities to serve."

Just as great teachers have always used stories to foster learning, great leaders tell stories to serve as the glue to mold a gathering of people into a partnership of colleagues. If stories are told with consistency, conviction, and clarity, they are heard. If stories are followed by aligned actions and obvious accountability, they are believed. If stories are repeated by those not the subject of the tale, they are remembered.

### **"They listen to all my questions..."**

"But you don't listen to me." It was the ages old line a teenage boy shot point-blank at his frustrated father in the heat of their verbal battle. The words ricocheted across several neighborhood yards. And, it tactlessly lassoed everyone in earshot into involuntary eavesdropping.

"What do you mean?" his father responded in his own defense. "I listen to you all the time." The decibel level of their fight suddenly went hushed and died after the next heart splitting line.

"You and mom listen to me talk. But, my friends listen to what I say!"

The lament of the teenager was for recordings on the heart, not for sound waves on the ear. He did not feel understood, and therefore valued. Today's employees feel over surveyed and undervalued. Too much effort goes into listening to employees talk rather than listening to what is said



and meant. Too often the pursuit is for facts rather than feelings; conversation instead of candor.

Leadership connections are similar to electrical connections. The most effective power comes from connections that are grounded and on the same wavelength. Employees are much more focused when they can operate from a wholesome, solid (no BS) position. Their commitment also soars when interaction between leader and employee is one of mutuality—that is, it has the spirit of an interpersonal dialogue.

### **“They get me what I need...real fast”**

Great leaders blend attentive learning with rapid action. Alphagraphics is a chain of quick copy print shops around the country. “What are ways you think we act differently than what we say or promise?” asked Dallas store manager Butch Clarke of a customer one day as a print job was being picked up.

“You talk about right job right at the right time, but I don’t see a clock anywhere,” responded the frequent customer. “Why don’t you put a big school house wall clock where both your employees and customers can see it?”

“Great idea,” Butch answered. Opening the cash register and withdrawing a \$20 bill, he turned to his colleague and said, “Steve, please take this money to store at the end of the block and buy us a big battery operated wall clock to put on the wall right there. We can do the paperwork later.”

The move was dramatic. No sooner had Butch learned of an improvement idea from a customer but he implemented the idea right in front of the customer. No, you can’t instantly implement every idea every customer or employee suggests. And, employees and customers don’t expect you to do everything they ask for. It is being valued that employees and customers light up about.

Great leaders have a strong drive for implementation. Granted, there is value in careful planning and thoughtful preparation. However, until there is execution, no plan is flawed; no preparation inadequate. Execution

spotlights all. Cultures can get enamored with the preliminaries since there are no consequences. Sometimes, the rapid, daring example of a Butch Clarke reinforces an attitude that it better to fail moving forward than to fail standing still.

## **“And, then they give me a big hug.”**

“Don’t ever hire someone you’d be reluctant to hug,” a highly successful CEO shared with a group of new managers. This particular CEO was not speaking of the workplace as a country club or fraternity house. Nor was he advocating leaders be huggers. Some people are uncomfortable with public displays of affection. Instead, he was espousing a belief that greatness emanates from a culture of affiliation and affirmation. When people work around people they genuinely like and enjoy, that spills over in their dealings with customers and into the pride they show in their work.

He was also implying that great leaders eliminate obstacles to expressing affection. And, “non-huggable” could be a barrier. Watch leaders in organizations known for greatness. Without exception, they are quick to affirm others. From a warm nod to a pat of the back to a big bear hug, they boldly and obviously express kinship with associates. Some are interpersonally shy and awkward with affirmation. Yet, they soar past their own internal reservation because they value the impact affirmations have on others.

“Feeling purple” is an individual choice. But, that choice is more easily taken when, behind the front line associate, stands a leader “telling neat stories, listening to all their questions, assertively getting associates what they need...and, then giving them a big hug!”

## **Leading Starts with Vision and Ends with Accountability**

Accountability is both the sweet spot and Achilles heel of most leaders. Leaders learn early the importance of “holding employees accountable” for results. Despite its downbeat reputation, accountability effectively executed remains the keystone for trust between leaders and their employees; employees with customers.

Trust is the glue that binds relationships. Without a climate of trust organizations are unable to deliver the type of service that fuels customer loyalty. Trust enables customers to willingly communicate their hopes and aspirations, not just needs and expectations. Customers who trust are more apt to offer candid guidance for improvement, not just the preverbal “fine!” Customers who trust are more tolerant of mistakes and more responsive to service recovery. Customers who trust are advocates, not just satisfied. And, customer trust is created and sustained by an accountability culture.

Customers form perceptions of service through the interface with an organization’s employees. Consequently, it is the actions of employees that drives or destroys the quality of service that yields customer loyalty. And, employees learn how to treat customers from the way their leaders treat them.

How can accountability assist leaders in developing a culture where trust is an ever present component? Let’s turn the clock back to Chip’s teenage years to illustrate how accountability can build trust and produce desired results while making the job of the leader less contentious.

Ray Bell was shy and conflict averse. At fourteen, his son, Chip, was completely the opposite. Calm conversations about chores quickly escalated into chaotic confrontations complete with slamming doors. Father-son quarrels were painful for both—Ray for a fray fought in his least comfortable arena; Chip for the innate rebellion of adolescence.

Then, it stopped.

Ray decided to stop being detention officer and let Chip decide the consequence of his work solely by his performance. Each week chores were discussed and expectations clarified along with the consequence for good, poor and non-performance. Ray supplied helpful resources and then provided the most important part—he kept his promise to deliver the consequence.

If Chip did all his chores in sync with agreed upon expectations, he got to go to the movies; if he did not, his performance communicated he was choosing to stay home on Saturday night. No more uproar. Just clear expectations, fair consequences, helpful support and assurance that consequences promised were consequences delivered.

Like the “before” Ray, leaders dread the performance appraisal aspect of accountability because it too often turns into hurt feelings, uncomfortable conflict and smoldering hostility. Following the example of the “after” Ray provides a method for leaders to help employees discipline their own performance. This accountability path has four parts: clear expectations for outcomes, frequent “check in” conversations to stay on track, candid feedback for growth, and fair consequences for great, poor and non-performances.

## **Set Clear Expectations**

Great leaders know they only get the best from employees if they expect the best. They also know creating “buy-in” is vital to delivering the expected results. Employees who participate in the development of expectations have much stronger commitment to achieving those expectations. While there are obviously times expectations must be determined by leaders, involvement should be the rule, not the exception.

Involvement includes conversations to gain agreement on the achievability of performance outcomes. If employees have concerns about the reasonableness of expectations these must be discussed to gain agreement on how results can be better achieved. Expectations that remain “unreasonable” in the eyes of Loyalty Creators feed stress and a loss of

commitment. Likewise, expectation setting requires communication of both the rationale and importance of expected outcomes, leaving the “how” for the employees to discern.

## **Frequent “check in” conversations**

Great leaders know feedback is crucial to assisting employees to a successful outcome. They also know it is the frequency of feedback that makes or breaks effectiveness. Imagine bowling blindfolded except for the very last frame. Make performance discussions a habit. If feedback conversations occur at least monthly they become more comfortable for both leader and employees.

One approach that can be a boon to employees achieving their expected outcomes is “future-stating.” Future-stating is a conversation in which leaders graphically state what future success will look like. In other words, “If expectations are realized, the following would have happened.” Starting with the desired destination, work backwards, agreeing on the action steps needed to achieve that future state. Develop regular touch points and “check in” conversations to examine the path traveled to date (versus plan) and settle on course corrections to ensure arrival at the future state. Think of these “check in” conversations as a GPS guiding performance to a new destination.

## **Candid feedback for growth**

How do leaders give feedback that stimulates growth and energizes excellence? Below are four steps guaranteed to improve the chances of employees gaining an understanding of what is needed to enhance performance:

### *★ State the Rationale for Feedback*

Help the employee gain a clear sense of why the feedback is being given. Ensure there is a unmistakable perspective for making sense of the feedback. Lace communications with language that says: “I care about your effectiveness.”

★ *Create a Climate of Identification — "I'm like you"*

You can enhance the employee's receptivity to feedback by creating a climate of empathy. Avoid "should's" and "oughts." Let facts guide your feedback rather than opinion. Keep the tone that of a thoughtful partner, not a controlling parent.

★ *Recommend a "Cancel-out" Action*

If feedback focuses solely on the past it can trigger employee defensiveness. If focused on the future, feedback can communicate promise and opportunity. Think of an action that is the opposite of the current ineffective practice that, if taken, could cancel out the old behavior. Instead of focusing on what the employee *should* have done, help channel the employee's energy toward what *can* be done to be more effective.

★ *Share Optimism and Communicate On-Going Support*

The communication of the expectation of success can turn employee hesitation into an enthusiastic attempt. Leader optimism about the likelihood of improvement can lend encouragement and support. Communicate willingness to being a resource to help the employee improve.

## **Fair Consequences for Performance**

One of the underpinnings of accountability is consistently applied consequences for great and/or poor performance. Employees trust leaders when leaders are fair and consistent. Employees realize when results are less than expected there ought to be consequences. They also presume there will be good consequences for exceeding expectations. When either fails to be delivered trust between employee and leader is weakened. When there are not consistent consequences, employees risk drifting toward mediocrity. When there are only consequences for poor performance, fear becomes an insidious aspect of the culture and responsible risk taking becomes extinct.

Accountability has too often a negative connotation. The simple mention of the word leads many to go immediately to the "dark side." Consistently

holding employees Creators accountable can have a very positive side. It is an essential for leaders who seek to build a climate of trust and generate the quality of customer service that drives customer loyalty.

Fast forward to today. Where is Chip on accountability? He is a new granddaddy to Kaylee, Annabeth and Cassie. And, he seems to have forgotten everything he ever knew about accountability!

## **The Final Word: Ethics**

Ethics is not a component of customer service. Ethics is fundamentally what service is made of. To serve is to enter into a covenant with a customer that promises worth will be exchanged for worth in a manner satisfactory to both. Covenants are implied agreements laced with an expectation of honesty, fairness and reliability. The customer does not wish to be surprised when the value of what is received is less than expected any more than the service provider wishes to be disappointed should the customer not live up to his or her promises. Therefore, poor service is not only rude business manners, it is unethical business practice.

People without firm ground, sink. And people without an internal compass of what is true and pure get lost along the way. Great service leaders always know "true North." Their self-confidence comes from their self-awareness. "If I lose my honor," Shakespeare has Anthony tell Octavia before the battle with Augustus, "I lose myself." Confucius wrote: "The superior man understands what is right; the inferior man understands what will sell."

Great service leaders are grounded and laced in complete, total, wall-to-wall, no-exceptions integrity. They stand on integrity; they are constructed of integrity, they reek of integrity. Integrity is the color they are painted; and true blue is a very bright blue, seen for miles around. Such leaders do not do half-assed integrity--as Tom Peters says, "There is no such thing as a minor lapse of integrity." Their integrity is as uncompromising as Abe Lincoln walking miles to return a book. They show their nobility when they courageously turn their backs on shady deals or unscrupulous actions.

Noble organizations and leaders are by no means perfect. We all fall from

grace from time to time. But temporary mistakes never deter great service leaders from pursuing a proper path. Occasional, unintentional acts of indiscretion carry a lesson for improvement and a reminder that the noble always carry a heavy dose of humility and not a trace of arrogance.

We live in a time when the world of business is under scrutiny because of a few well publicized violations of public confidence. These blights occurred, not through some momentary lapse of honor, but through a pervasive abuse of power, an arrogant pursuit of greed on the backs of innocent employees and trusting marketplace, and a flagrant disregard for the fundamentals of private enterprise. It will take years to reclaim the loss of trust. Perhaps the return to confidence can occur in part through a renewed commitment to the important covenant we call "service."



## CBG Serving as Leader Inventory

We have included the *Serving as Leader* Inventory. We use this inventory in a classroom setting for participants to get feedback from their subordinates about the leadership practices covered in this e-book. One way to implement the feedback process is to give each subordinate a copy of the inventory along with a return envelope. Make certain the "Person being rated" line has already been completed. Designate someone to collect the sealed envelopes with the inventory inside. Ask subordinates not to write anything on the inventory--simply circle the answers. Once all the inventories have been completed, tabulate the results. Create a simple grid with numbers 1-21 on the vertical axis and SA, A, D, SD along the horizontal axis. Put a hash mark for each response.

The key to interpretation is to pay attention to the trends. You will likely get mixed reviews on some questions. Notice the ones with the majority of respondents on the positive (SA and A) or negative (D and SD) side. Remember, the positives are your strengths. Use what you do well to improve what you need to improve. After the inventory below, you will find more detailed interpretation around the seven roles of great service leaders.

# SERVING AS LEADER

## Leadership Assessment Inventory

**Person Being Rated:** \_\_\_\_\_

This questionnaire is designed to give your manager or supervisor information on his or her leadership practices. You are one of several people completing this inventory. Your answers will be completely anonymous. Please circle the responses below which best describe your experience. Leave any items blank which you cannot accurately answer or which do not apply. Please do NOT write your name or any words on this inventory. Return the completed questionnaire in a sealed envelope to the person designated to collect it.

SA = Strongly Agree    A = Agree    D = Disagree    SD = Strongly Disagree

- |   |    |   |   |    |     |
|---|----|---|---|----|-----|
| 1. I am almost always clear on what my leader expects of me.  | SA | A | D | SD | 1.  |
| 2. My leader communicates with me in a way that lets me know he or she is interested in my success.                             | SA | A | D | SD | 2.  |
| 3. I am completely satisfied with how well my leader knows me and understands my unique needs.                                  | SA | A | D | SD | 3.  |
| 4. When appropriate, my leader seeks my input on those decisions which will impact me.  | SA | A | D | SD | 4.  |
| 5. My leader regularly encourages me to provide new ideas.  | SA | A | D | SD | 5.  |
| 6. My leader treats our team members more like a group of partners than a collection of workers who just do what they are told. | SA | A | D | SD | 6.  |
| 7. My leader gives adequate time to help me learn more about the things I need to know.   | SA | A | D | SD | 7.  |
| 8. My leader gives me the right amount of advice I need it to do a good job.  | SA | A | D | SD | 8.  |
| 9. I get regular feedback from my leader which helps me improve my performance.   | SA | A | D | SD | 9.  |
| 10. I know that the work I am doing is important.   | SA | A | D | SD | 10. |

- |   |    |   |   |    |     |
|---|----|---|---|----|-----|
| 11. I am almost always clear on how my efforts relate to and impact others in my team.  | SA | A | D | SD | 11. |
| 12. My leader helps me see the link between my work and the goals and objectives of the team.   | SA | A | D | SD | 12. |
| 13. I know that if I improvise on how my job is performed, my leader will be supportive.  | SA | A | D | SD | 13. |
| 14. If I thought I needed to “go out on a limb” to perform more effectively, I am confident my leader would support me in taking risks. | SA | A | D | SD | 14. |
| 15. If I did my best but made a mistake, my leader might be disappointed but he or she would be forgiving and encouraging.              | SA | A | D | SD | 15. |
| 16. My leader communicates honest optimism for the work I do.   | SA | A | D | SD | 16. |
| 17. My leader is a good example of a person who is committed to excellence.   | SA | A | D | SD | 17. |
| 18. My leader is someone I can trust.   | SA | A | D | SD | 18. |
| 19. I am confident my leader would give me personal recognition for doing a good job.   | SA | A | D | SD | 19. |
| 20. My leader allocates time periodically to celebrate the successes of our team.   | SA | A | D | SD | 20. |
| 21. My leader demonstrates enthusiasm for the mission or vision of our unit.  | SA | A | D | SD | 21. |

## Interpreting Your Serving as Leader Inventory

This appendix is designed to assist in interpreting your “Serving as Leader” inventory. There are several important points to consider as you begin. First, the inventory is not necessarily a reflection of the facts; it is an opportunity to learn how your employees perceive your actions as a leader. If you find yourself wanting to argue with the rightness or accuracy of their answers, you are likely missing the point. Also, if you did not receive the response sheets that you expected, that in itself could be feedback. We suggest you ask your employees as a group the reasons all the responses were not received.

There are several ways to interpret your inventory. First, simply notice which of the five core areas (connect, partner, align, empower, and champion) are highest and lowest compared with the others. Second, divide the overall five scores by the number of people who responded. This will give you an average. The closer you come to +2 (everyone who responded ‘strongly agreed’) the better. If any of the five scores fall below a +1, you have some work to do. However, it is important to determine if that work is largely with one person or the overall group. Four people giving you “Agrees” with only one person giving you a “strongly disagree” is a very different message than most of your employees giving you “disagrees.” Below are a few considerations for each of the five core areas.

What could a low score in CONNECT mean? (Q’s 1, 2, and 3)

- Your employees don’t see you enough.
- You spend time with some people, but not with others.
- You only focus on the tasks to be done and not on the relationships.
- You are pessimistic and negative about what needs to be done.
- You are not focusing on what is important to your employees.

What could a low score in PARTNER mean? (Q’s 4, 5 and 6)

- Your employees do not see how their work fits in with others.
- You tell people what to do but you do not invite their input or ideas.

- You make it clear that you are not interested in hearing bad news.
- You say you want honesty, but then you punish others if they are honest.
- Your employees see ways you could promote better teamwork that you are missing or electing to ignore.

What could a low score in MENTOR mean? (Q's 7, 8, and 9)

- You do not demonstrate a sincere interest in the continual development of your employees.
- You hoard knowledge you know that would be beneficial to others.
- You do not allocate time to teach others in a fashion it shows it is important.
- Your employees are bored and eager to learn and be more challenged.

What could a low score in ALIGN mean? (Q's 10, 11, and 12)

- Your employees want a clearer sense of the "why's," not just the "what's."
- Your employees need a clearer sense of purpose and mission, not just "do this and do that."
- You need to communicate more clearly what you expect of others.
- Your employees are frustrated that you are not holding non-performers or poor performers accountable for their negative performance.
- Your employees want more coaching from you—more helpful advice and feedback that helps them improve.

What could a low score on EMPOWER mean? (Q's 13, 14, and 15)

- Your employees think they too often treated like irresponsible children, rather than as mature adults trying to do a good job.
- Your employees would like more coaching when they make a mistake and not your yelling, ignoring, or complaining.
- Your employees think you don't trust them to make smart decision.
- Your employees worry that you are uninterested in their development.
- Your employees think you are a victim of bureaucracy and use it as an excuse rather than stand up for what they need to be effective.

What could a low score on INSPIRE mean? (Q's 16, 17, and 18)

- Your employees look to you as a role model and fail to see you exhibit traits, practices or values they want to emulate.
- Your employees view you as pessimistic about the unit and its potential.
- Your employees do not trust you to be leading in a fashion that reflects their needs or interests.
- Your employees see you as playing a role, not being yourself.

What could a low score on CHAMPION mean? (Q's 19, 20, and 21)

- Your employees would like you to celebrate when they do well, not just move on to the next assignment.
- You sometimes take actions that cause your employees to wonder if they can trust you or not.
- You are too negative and pessimistic about the work of the team. Your employees would like to see enthusiasm and commitment to the vision or mission.
- You need to be more of a cheerleader and less of a taskmaster.
- Your employees need you to be a leader, not just an administrator.

What next? We suggest you gather the people you requested complete the inventory. Express your appreciation for their taking the time to respond. Highlight some of the positives you received; solicit their help in interpreting the feedback you found confusing or difficult to interpret; and ask for their suggestions on ways to improve any items you received low scores on. Keep in mind, the goal of the inventory is strictly leadership development. Who better to help you with that goal than the people most impacted by your leadership?

## **Additional Reading on Service from the Chip Bell Group**

Bell, Chip R. and John R. Patterson, *Wired and Dangerous: How Your Customers Have Changed and What to Do About it*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, due Spring, 2011.

Bell, Chip R. and John R. Patterson. *Take Their Breath Away: How Imaginative Service Creates Devoted Customers*. New York: Wiley, 2009.

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Bell, Chip R. and Ron Zemke, *Managing Knock Your Socks Off Service*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., New York: AMACOM Books, 2007; originally published in 1992.

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## About the Authors

**Chip R. Bell** is a senior partner with The Chip Bell Group and manages their offices near Dallas and Atlanta. Prior to starting CBG in 1980, he was Director of Management and Organization Development for NCNB (now Bank of America). Dr. Bell holds graduate degrees from Vanderbilt University and the George Washington University. He was a highly decorated infantry unit commander in Viet Nam with the elite 82nd Airborne. Chip is the author or co-author of several best-selling books including *Take Their Breath Away*, *Customer Loyalty Guaranteed*, *Magnetic Service*, *Service Magic*, *Customers as Partners*, *Managers as Mentors* and *Managing Knock Your Socks Off Service*. His newest book, *Wired and Dangerous: How Your Customers Have Changed and What To Do About it*, will be released in May, 2011. He has appeared on CNBC, CNN, ABC, Fox Business Network, Bloomberg TV; his work has been featured in the *Wall Street Journal*, *Fortune*, *USA Today*, *Fast Company* and *Business Week*. A renowned keynote speaker, Chip has served as consultant or trainer to such organizations as GE, Microsoft, CVS/pharmacy, Cadillac, Marriott, Universal Orlando, Ritz-Carlton Hotels, Harley-Davidson, Pfizer, Duke Energy, Lockheed-Martin and Allstate.

**John R. Patterson** is President of the CBG affiliate Progressive Insights, Inc., headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia, with over twenty years of executive leadership experience in the hospitality, business services and real estate industries. John holds a graduate degree in business from the Darden School at the University of Virginia. His consulting practice specializes in helping organizations around the world effectively manage complex culture change built around customer and employee loyalty. Prior to founding Progressive Insights, his work experience included positions with NationsBank (now Bank of America), Homestead Village, Inc., Guest Quarters Hotels, Post Inn Hotels, and Trammell Crow Residential. His consulting clients include McDonald's Corporation, Freeman®, Northeast Utilities, Texas Instruments, Kaiser Permanente, Southern California Edison, TravelClick, Banco General, McDonald's Corporation, Pegasus Solutions, Banco Popular, General Growth Properties, Cousins Properties, EDiS Corporation, Manheim and The College Board. He is the co-author of



*Customer Loyalty Guaranteed* and the bestselling book, *Take Their Breath Away: How Imaginative Service Creates Devoted Customers* as well as numerous articles in professional journals. His newest book, *Wired and Dangerous: How Your Customers Have Changed and What To Do About it*, will be released in May, 2011.

**The CHIP BELL Group** is a confederation of highly experienced consultants who passionately pursue one core vision—to help clients become famous for the kind of service experiences that result in devoted customers. All members of this long term alliance are independent consultants with their own consulting practices. They periodically work together as a high-performance team on selected consulting projects. All share key values: making cutting edge contributions both to the profession and to their clients; practicing the world-class service they encourage their clients to emulate; and, working to leave their clients with the capacity and competence to be more successful. CBG also produces training and delivers programs for all levels of the organization from front line employees to executive leadership. Visit their website at [www.wiredanddangerous.com](http://www.wiredanddangerous.com) for additional information about consulting, keynotes and training.

Chip R. Bell  
214-522-5777  
[chip@chipbell.com](mailto:chip@chipbell.com)  
[www.chipbell.com](http://www.chipbell.com)  
twitter: chiprbell

John R. Patterson  
770-329-1459  
[john@johnrpatterson.com](mailto:john@johnrpatterson.com)  
[www.johnrpatterson.com](http://www.johnrpatterson.com)  
twitter: johnrpatt

CBG Blog: [www.taketheirbreathaway.typepad.com](http://www.taketheirbreathaway.typepad.com)