



Lead On...

The Fifteenth in the series: ***An Executive Summary for Busy Managers.***

Not quite five suns... but that should not stop you from reading this book.

Bonjour! As of December 1st 2005 there are nine recorded Starbucks stores located in Paris, France. That pales in comparison to the 193 stores located within New York City but it is a good start. Starbucks only started in Paris in January 2004.

Leadership skills take on a whole new meaning when you have to convince men and women that it is a good idea to: live under the ocean in a steel tube for months on end, live within a stones throw of a nuclear reactor, work and play amongst 100 nuclear warheads and be good enough at your job to be held responsible for warding off WWII. When someone with that type of experience starts talking, people tend to start listening.

The current book was recommended to me by a friend that knew I was interested in different types of management and leadership books. Lead On, A Practical Approach to Leadership by Rear Admiral Dave Oliver, Jr., USN (*I feel bad for the secretary who had to type his name on the annual holiday cards over and over again*) turned out to be an excellent recommendation. The book was a little tough to find since it was written in 1992 and not stocked by the local bookstores, but nothing Amazon.com could not handle with an extra week wait.

If you enjoy reading Tom Clancy novels, you will enjoy Lead On (*Have you ever*

heard someone say, "You will enjoy reading this book on management"). The author has developed the book around his firsthand experience as a submariner in the Navy. It has a Hunt for Red October flair and you would swear that some of the stories told through the course of the book would make good movies. But, most importantly, Oliver has a knack for slipping in little gems of leadership advice.

"Learning to be a leader involves getting up from your chair, going to where the action is, and getting involved. On a submarine that can be summarized as 'Get up, go back, get down and get dirty'. Being a division officer is mind over sleep."

I have met many managers that will get into the middle of a situation after their boss tells them to go solve the problem. I only know a few leaders that will roll-up their sleeves and offer to help at the first sign of distress. As Oliver discusses, there is a big difference between a micromanager and a helpful leader. A leader makes sure that his or her people know they are available when needed and lets people have an opportunity to learn on their own when the situation allows. A leader is also not afraid to get first-hand knowledge by walking around talking to people. By walking around, the leader avoids being "captured" by their own staff. Sometimes a well meaning staff can insulate a manager so much that important decision factors are completely unknown.

One individual that is held up as an example of a great leader in Lead On is Admiral Rickover. Admiral Rickover is credited with being the architect of the



Nuclear Navy. This man was responsible for essentially changing the way the Navy operated. How did he do it? Well he certainly did not do it from behind a desk. As Oliver describes, Admiral Rickover led from the front of the charge. The Admiral participated in sea-trials for every new nuclear submarine commissioned in his time. That means he was on the first ride that would prove whether or not the hull would be crushed by the immense pressure of the deep ocean. He would also find the most skeptical part of the boat and plant himself right on top of or next to the worry bead for the duration of the ride. Essentially he was personally putting a stranglehold on the emotion of fear for the rest of his troops by outwardly demonstrating his confidence.

When was the last time that you witnessed a leader publicly giving their personal guarantee for a positive outcome to a situation?

The only real downside to this book is that you occasionally find yourself at the end of one of Oliver's anecdotes wondering, "What the hell did that have to do with anything". It is not an unpleasant use of time; it just seems that occasionally the story wanders off point a little bit. However, even the divergent sections contain useful knowledge; you just have to do more of the thinking for yourself. The first half of the book moves extremely fast. The last half starts to get into more serious challenges and therefore takes more concentration and more time. You will be tempted to lay the volume down and move on but, I encourage you to stay the course and see for yourself how

some of his ideas and experience could help your own style.

This is really the first book that I have read where the author specifically talks about how people desiring to be leaders need to dig into the hard problems to gain the experience (I was lucky enough to have a couple of bosses that assigned me to every "doghouse" problem that came down the pike so I never needed to request a hard one. Are you challenging your top people with the tough tasks?). Absolutely essential reading for any protégés out there so you mentors take note as a possible holiday trinket.

The book in a nutshell:

- Leading by example is essential
- Experience only comes with action

Not a New York Times bestseller, but plenty of practical advice to make anyone take a second look at how ship-shape their own organization is maintained and operated.

Just my opinion and we all know what "they" say about opinions...

Thanks

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