

STEPPING UP: Leadership Lessons, Coaching Counsel, and Volunteer Victories!

Description

When you're the person at the top of the org chart, you're most often expected to do it all: leading, managing, coaching, directing, guiding, monitoring, and finally, evaluating. Did everything work? Great! Then it's back to leading again.

Well, these all may sound similar, but each task has a slightly different definition, and a subtly different tool kit needed to succeed. Let's look at the big three!

Leaders are big picture people. They are great at creating and communicating a vision that drives and motivates others. They are out front, with the "carrot," encouraging others to follow. They can pull people along toward a mission, they can be motivating, and they are great at encouraging others on a broad scale.

But leaders often delegate the details of execution or implementation. They are the big picture people—they need to learn to let go of some of the details.

Managers usually tend to those details. While leadership is focused on motivating and inspiring, managing means more to regulate, or administer. Often in organizations, you'll find the manager behind the staff. Managers push the team forward while maintaining the company's standards of excellence. They are process people.

Coaches tend to be somewhere in between. If leaders are in front of the group and managers are behind the group, you'll most often find coaches alongside the group. They wield neither the carrot OR the stick, and they neither push nor pull. Their tool of choice? A whistle.

Their guiding principle is to align the employees' goals with the company's goals, or to align the employees' talents with the job expectations. They identify the gaps (if any), and then coach to what is needed to bridge those gaps. A coach's greatest reward is seeing their team reach the next level!

One thing about coaches, though: they rarely show up on the org chart. Why? Because most organizations can't afford to maintain a full-time position solely responsible for the coaching function. But in fact, it is a critical component of the toolbox of effective leaders and successful managers.

Both leaders and managers can, and should, use coaching strategies and tactics. But the ways in which these are used vary, in accordance with the fundamental differences between leadership and management.

Like I said, leadership involves communicating big picture ideas to a lot of folks who don't necessarily have that 20,000 foot view. To successfully motivate and coach, they need to convey a sense of value and importance to the efforts of ALL employees in the pursuit of the organization's goals. Good leaders will inspire and engage, and the fruits of their labors will be a team that works

together, unified in an overarching goal and a complete understanding of what represents victory.

Similarly, managers also need to communicate the importance of these goals to members of the team, many of whose daily activities might represent only one component of the organization's efforts. But managers need to help establish processes and individual goals and build them into a system of accountability that ensures they will get done, contributing appropriately to the big picture goals. Managers must keep their team members focused on the work that is vital to everyone reaching the finish line, especially if the role they play isn't always obviously tied to those large scale goals.

I've found that one of the best arenas in which to learn, practice, and evaluate these skills is in the realm of volunteer management. But you need to take the big step and make it happen—free time isn't just going to magically appear.

While honing leadership and management skills in the course of one's job is of course an important and ongoing process, I recommend that aspiring leaders find an opportunity within their community with a volunteer effort of some type and take a crack at assuming leadership in a particular activity or project in which the workforce isn't necessarily motivated by monetary gain.

When I was teaching leadership at the collegiate level, I incorporated this idea into my upper-level course each year. The final project for my students was to manage a particular aspect of a local volunteer project. One of our local hospitals operated a non-profit cancer-treatment housing center, in which patients and their families were housed while undergoing their therapy.

I felt a strong desire to help. So, I created a major volunteer raising event called "A Day of Hope." Dozens of volunteers were needed and recruited from throughout the community to staff and manage different aspects of the event. The job for my leadership students: recruit those volunteers!

This was a task that required a diverse array of leadership and management skills. Each student was required to come up with a game plan for raising awareness and interest among different sectors of the community, and then [motivate those potential volunteers into making the commitment](#) to invest their time and energies in this important pursuit. (Remember those leadership skills we talked about earlier?)

They also had to set up and organize recruiting stations around town, create a database of interested and prospective volunteers, compile and communicate job descriptions, event information, and time schedules, and then manage a day-long recruiting blitz. (Not unlike those management skills we mentioned a few paragraphs back.)

All the recruiting activities took place during the course of one Saturday. My students found themselves setting up tables, booths, and signs all over town for an eight-hour shift. (This highly visible volunteer effort also paid dividends for the college, as the local media covered it heavily and saluted the efforts and contributions of our leadership class—a definite PR bonus!)

The event proved very successful, and it was rare that any of my students weren't able to come up with their fair share of volunteers. But more than that, they came away with invaluable experience and a great opportunity to flex their fledgling leadership muscles in the pursuit of a legitimate and quantifiable goal.

Managing a volunteer effort not only requires pretty much every skill and technique in the leadership and management toolbox, but the real-world experience provides a perspective that my students would never have gotten in the classroom. And without the “carrot” and “stick” that comes with such responsibilities in the real world of paid employees, those skills had to be employed to maximum advantage with an emphasis on human relations, inter-personal communication, and the powers of persuasion. All skills essential to a successful business career.

In a way, managing a volunteer event is a little like “Leadership Unplugged.” It strips away a lot of the perks and advantages of corporate leadership and gets right down to the basics. Because when it comes right down to it, it’s all about people. [and getting them to work together to accomplish great things.](#)

And isn’t that in YOUR job description?

Think about taking that next step! Chances are, there’s a volunteer organization or campaign that you’ve had contact with in one way or another. And chances are, they have a job that might just be right up your alley.

I challenge you to reach out to them and get involved! There’s no better way to polish and expand your skillset in the areas of management, leadership, and coaching.

The pay may not be that great, but the rewards are fantastic.



Dr. Cindy McGovern

Orange Leaf Consulting (OLC) ***First Lady of Sales***

Dr. Cindy has her Masters in Communication and her Doctorate in Organizational Communication with an Emphasis on Organizational Leadership and Ethics. But she also has real-world experience, spending the early portion of her career as a marketing director in the commercial real estate field.

From the beginning, she has wanted to teach others. She began at the collegiate level, leading courses in Public Speaking, Interpersonal Communication, Persuasion, Pre-Law Evidence, and Argumentation. Her classroom experience provided the framework for the next chapter of her career.

Upon her return to the business sector, she formed Orange Leaf Consulting. Why the name? Dr. Cindy knows the one thing all organizations have in common is **change**. And she realized that one change everyone loves is the color of leaves in the fall.

She created Orange Leaf Consulting to reflect these positive feelings toward change, to convey to her clients that change always presents opportunities, especially to create a competitive advantage—and she has instructed countless clients in just how to make that happen.

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