

THE LEADERSHIP LENS Newsletter

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A monthly resource providing insight, opinion & practical information on leadership, creativity & balance

To Err is Good Leadership

I am astonished at the amount of digital cameras that have come onto the market. Last year in 2003, sales of digital cameras surpassed those of film cameras for the first time in history. Even the last member of my family who has a computer just purchased a digital camera, and I learned that my soon-to-be retiring doctor has a digital camera waiting to capture photographs of his family and friends. However, like any other electronic appliance that has a good deal of circuitry, digital cameras are extremely delicate.

I found this out quite recently as the official photographer at a large corporate awards ceremony. I make sure that I check my equipment the day before an assignment, and I always bring redundancy meaning at least one backup camera. In this particular case, I turned on my digital camera, but it wasn't responding. It kept giving me an error in the form of the dreaded 'err' on the screen. I thought the digital camera had been dropped without my knowledge. I read and then reread the manual taking its' advice, but nothing seemed to work. I took a deep breath and let my customer know that I would not be able to start taking photographs at the time she needed.

She was surprised at first, but when I showed her the 'err' on my display, her countenance changed from one of impatience to one of concern. She immediately said, 'come with me back to the event command center.' I quickly followed, my heart beating loudly in my ears. She researched my digital camera manufacturer's web site on her laptop as I went to retrieve plenty of film for my backup camera. When I returned, she had the technical support number ready as I was patched through to an engineer. With his assistance, I was able to fix the digital camera over the phone.

Admitting my mistake or error took personal leadership and courage. A boss, and in my case a temporary one, who promotes risk taking and the admission of an occasional mistake creates an environment for better job performance. "This requires a mentality that encourages learning rather than a fear of making a mistake. Try something new and different, but know we're not going to kill each other if things don't work out," says Rob Sheehan, the Director of Executive Education at the Burns Academy of Leadership at the University of Maryland.

At this point, my client and I had formed a closer connection because we had worked together to solve a problem that was important to both of us. According to Steve Robbins, a columnist for the Harvard Business Review, "The organization you work for must support risk taking, but unfortunately most organizations only support outcomes. Are you willing to pad your schedule with time for failures and experimentation? Will you step up to the plate and give a larger bonus to someone who learned and failed than to someone who reached an important outcome through sheer luck?"

Just as good photography requires the admission of mistakes by putting the customer's interests ahead of a photographer's ego, good organizational stewardship demands that integrity be placed over self-interest. Leaders who are willing to wrestle with decisions that may involve personal sacrifice by admitting mistakes make themselves more like the rest of us, fallible. Whether you are the leader of an organization or exercise personal leadership behind the lens of a camera, you show that you are more like the people you lead by admitting your own mistakes. This creates closer connections with your employees and your customers. Not only is to err human, it shows good leadership.

About Mark Sincevich:

Mark Sincevich is a photography expert who speaks professionally to organizations on creativity, balance, leadership and personal development. Mark has been practicing photography for over 21 years and continues to sharpen his skills as an instructor at the Washington School of Photography. He is an active member of the National Speaker's Association and brings over 17 years of experience in public accounting, and high technology sales and marketing into his programs. He has written two books and numerous articles. For more information on Mark's professional speaking programs, photography, books and CDs contact Staash Press at (301) 654-3010, info@staashpress.com or www.staashpress.com.

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