



# the Leadership LENS

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a monthly resource providing insight, opinion & practical information on life balance, creativity & perspective

## First, Take Care of Yourself

When I opened the front door to get the Friday morning paper, it was comfortably warm and there wasn't a cloud in the sky. This lack of cloud cover is unusual for Washington, DC. It was certainly welcomed this particular Friday as I was taking a 'sick-preventative' or an 'attitude adjustment' day. The week was filled with meetings and speaking engagements, so I was looking forward to taking a day to get back in touch with myself. It's better to bring my life back into balance a little along the way compared with pushing too hard and winding up sick and uncomfortable. This is how a day like this became known as a sick-preventative day. Later, I changed the day to a more upbeat and positive title, an attitude adjustment day.

My attitude adjustment day began with a hot bowl of oatmeal, raisins, walnuts and plain yogurt followed by a drive to a newer gym and spa. I worked out on an elliptical stepping machine for about an hour before getting the knots worked out of my shoulder by a professional masseuse. As I was getting ready to leave a conversation started with a member of the club. We talked about the importance of exercising, his and his wife's enjoyment of taking bicycling trips to Europe and his challenge of trying to find the elusive workout 'high' that he first experienced in high school sports. It turned out I was talking to Bill Regardie, the founder, publisher and editor-in-chief of *Regardie's Magazine* (published from 1979 to 2001). Bill's creativity and leadership got the magazine named the best local business magazine in America nine times. In fact, it was *Regardie's* who broke numerous stories that shook up the corruption in Washington, DC while maintaining journalistic integrity.

I said, "You did a great job at your magazine." He said, "It wasn't me who did all of the work, but the fact that I surrounded myself with top journalists and business people. They get the credit." Bill Regardie is a prime example of the importance of hiring top people at all times to magnify your own success. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why I waited for years to find the right graphic designer and most recently a top editor who runs her own charitable foundation. I was waiting for top performers to come along and didn't want to settle for mediocrity, as this would certainly affect my performance and the perception of my work. *Success Magazine* interviewed Colin Powell about how to be a leader, and more



US Capitol Dome, Washington, DC, (c) Mark Sincevich

It will make the difference between organization and achievement."

For a brief time I was the executive vice president and COO of a startup software company. It was just a fancy title where I was responsible for sales and marketing and inspiring 18 people. The company made health club software including the financial transaction components. I felt responsible for each of my employees and wanted to make sure they brought home a paycheck to support their families. As a startup, we had limited cash flow and the president and chairman were supposed to raise more investment capital. Fundraising has a lot to do with sales and marketing and this aspect didn't fit into the personalities of the two top honchos. I stepped up to the plate and helped raise some much-needed cash, and this allowed the company to survive for many more months. Eventually we didn't raise enough money and everyone lost his or her job. Along the way, I learned quite a bit about risk taking, intuition, following one's dream and putting people first.

In one of the best leadership books I have read to date, *Shackleton's Way – Leadership lessons from the Great Antarctic Explorer*, authors Margot Morrell and Stephanie Capparell state, "The Boss (as Shackleton came to be known) learned how to select a crew, to conceive and executive scientific experiments and observations, and to adapt plans to fit changing needs. His long-standing convictions – the belief in putting the welfare of his men first and respecting each individual – remained admirably steadfast, even as his popularity grew and the burdens on his performance increased." The Queen of England even knighted Shackleton for his explorations. His greatest achievement was not filled with the success of finding the South Pole,

importantly, one worth following. In Powell's Leadership Lessons, Rule #8 he says, "Only by attracting the best people will you accomplish great deeds. Surround yourself with the brightest and the best.

but in how he handled his missed attempt. He was lost for nearly two years in extreme cold, but managed to bring all twenty-seven of his men home alive. By focusing on their welfare first and foremost, he became more famous than if he had discovered the South Pole!

Executing great leadership begins with the leader making wise choices. Being able to lead others effectively begins with great self-care so that others can be inspired by example. I had to brave a bit of Shackleton's cold weather as I set up my tripod and camera atop the roof of the Reserve Officers Association (ROA) early one morning. The coffee I poured into the lid of my thermos went cold within 30 seconds. On this particular morning, I woke up at 4:30am so I had time to arrive, exchange pleasantries and set up my camera gear in time for the magical minutes of light that were going to hit the front of the US Capitol dome. Since I don't always know what to expect on an assignment, I tend to bring extra gear just in case. I want to ensure my customers will receive the best photographs or in the case of a professional speaking assignment, the best speaking program possible. I do this by (1) planning for the unexpected, (2) having a positive and 'can do' attitude, and (3) asking myself WIIFT (what's in it for them). Even though I don't have employees, I put the welfare of my customers first and foremost in my actions.

Being able to treat my customers so well starts with treating myself very well first. By working out and eating a nutritious diet on a regular basis, I am more able to plan for an unexpected health problem down the road. This helps to ensure I will be able to complete my assignments. Making sure I take time out for myself during the week means I will be more 'present' with my customers, family and friends. And knowing what's important for me means I have an easier time of recognizing what's important for my customers. Effective leadership begins with good personal leadership. It means setting a great example, so you will be around to take care of your customers,

your employees and your family. When you respect the needs of others, this positive energy or karma will eventually come back to you too.



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