

Leading with Focus

The last time I had seen many of my high school classmates it was 20 years ago at our 5-year high school reunion picnic. The picnic was unremarkable, so I thought an actual reunion party marking 25 years had to be interesting. When I broached the reunion subject with my wife, her response was beyond enthusiastic. Back in high school I was the treasurer of the nerdy science and technology club, wore the same pair of brown shoes every day, and worked at a Carvel Ice Cream store. She loves to tease me about how I was back then. I was determined to make a strong appearance to 'show' my classmates that I had improved from standing in line for nine hours waiting for the premier of "Return of the Jedi." Ok, at least I wasn't in a costume.

For this reunion the picnic had been upgraded to a 'Vegas-style' lounge complete with a Tarot card reader, 9-piece band, and a healthy salad bar. I wanted to show my classmates I now owned black dress shoes and a nice European suit; more importantly, I was open to the possibility of some interesting conversations. The event went beyond my expectations topped off by one classmate saying, "you're Mark Sincevich?" mouth agape. He must not have recognized me without my Star Wars lunch box. I reconnected with many classmates including Raj Khera, a fellow graduate of Richard Montgomery High School. I was reminded that Raj and I had attended the University of Maryland at College Park, were in



Three Manakans at Santorini (Thera), Greece, Showing the Rule of Thirds. (c) Mark Sincevich

Air Force ROTC for a time, and shared a passion for entrepreneurship.

Raj's latest venture is a company called MailerMailer.com located in Rockville, Maryland. While at GovCon, his previous company, Raj and his brother wondered why they couldn't send automated E-mails from a qualified list and track the statistics of each mailing down to the number of recipients who opened their mail. They also wanted to add special features like being able to target by zip code radius along with exceptional customer service. Raj has been able to achieve these objectives by being very focused on what he wanted to accomplish. He has been able to do well with his company because he pays attention to his personal leadership.

For an executive to be an effective leader, he or she must already be exercising great personal leadership first. Since I use photography to more effectively communicate concepts in my speaking programs, let me give you a photography analogy. If you asked me

what accessory I value beyond all others, what would you say? It's not going to be a flashgun, a certain type of film, or spare batteries. While these things are necessary, they won't consistently make a great photograph like a well-made and lightweight tripod. I have a carbon fiber Gitzo tripod that I hope to pass down to my sons someday. By definition a tripod has three legs.

Creativity Leg

Great personal leadership or leading with focus starts with the first leg of the tripod or what I call the creativity leg. Everything we see around us, everything, started as an idea. How can leaders come up with new ideas if they are not 'seeing' or practicing creativity? Without new products, new services or new procedures, an organization can't be competitive. Creativity is beyond taking a new way home from work or trying to be creative for the next 30 minutes. It really delves into how you exercise your 'creativity muscle' on a regular basis. Maybe you play guitar, are an avid history buff or in my case practice photography. You need a consistent source of new ideas that do not come from your normal surroundings. One way I practice my creativity is by automatically adding a half-day minimum to every business trip. I get out and 'see' my world. Practiced on a regular basis, this creativity outlet will add more character to each location and will also be the source of new ideas and even photographs.

One way an employer can add a creativity routine is to have a program to cross-train employees, so the accountants will understand

what it means to sell products or services. Some organizations provide paid time off for community work or have a local 'pet' project that gets a lot of attention. One of my customers, Lockheed Martin based in Bethesda, MD, "invests in the quality of life in the communities where our (their) employees work and live." This strengthens community connections, might involve learning new skills and allows for creativity to emerge. Of course there is also the added incentive of attending a trade show in a different city. Whatever programs organizations decide to implement, it's clear that employees and their leaders need the space for creativity. Creativity is like that; it needs the room to come forth.

Powerful Communications Leg

Once you get a great idea, it's not good enough just to write it down. You need to be able to communicate it effectively. The second leg of the leading with focus tripod is having powerful communications. How do your communications become more powerful? Let me borrow another photography analogy known as Simple Shapes. Some of the best photographs don't need a caption, because you 'get it' right away. The photograph is simple, yet powerful. The simplicity of a photograph is achieved by having the three simple shapes, triangle, circle and square, present in the photo. When you apply this concept to your great idea, more people will be able to understand it. Simple ideas have the most power, because more employees and customers will resonate with it. When you have resonance, you set the stage for positive action.

Recently, I worked with the US Army Evaluation Command with an office in Alexandria, VA. I helped them improve the quality of

their presentations given by senior leadership. They wanted new hires to understand key concepts and take positive action on them soon afterward. They were reminded that powerful communications is divided into three parts, like the three simple shapes. First, you need to refine your content by doing great research. Next, you'll need to involve the audience by understanding them better. The last step is to rehearse your delivery, so your communications are congruent with your content. Now, the Army will be able to improve the quality of their programs by simplifying their messages. They have the tools to achieve resonance.

Life Balance Leg

So far we have two legs of the leading with focus tripod identified, creativity and powerful communications. A tripod wouldn't be able to support itself or the weight on top without a third or stabilizing leg. The stabilizing leg is also known as the life balance leg. Plus having life balance provides a great deal of personal stability. It would be a real shame if you came up with a great idea, communicated it in a powerful way, but weren't around to see your idea to fruition. The stabilizing leg of your leading with focus tripod allows you to see and monitor the implementation of your idea. Life balance also reinforces a self-perpetuating cycle. The more you practice work life balance by spending time with your family, taking charge of your health, and getting in touch with a higher purpose, the more space you give creativity to emerge. And the process of leading with focus is able to repeat itself again and again.

One of the best ways to practice life balance is step away from your normal routines by taking time off. I still can't figure out why the United States is the only country

in the world without a vacation law. Expedia.com conducts an annual deprivation survey and estimates that Americans give back an average of 3 vacation days per year worth over \$60 Billion. Unfortunately this number continues to increase! As a leader, you need to get over any stigma associated with not taking all of your vacation. Taking a long weekend, an extended vacation and even time off without pay will enable you to learn new skills directly applicable to your organization. It will recharge you too. Remember leave the cell phone, laptop & PDA at the office, as they will intrude on being in the moment.

At one of my speaking programs, I learned a senior manager greatly desired to temporarily relocate to Italy for six months. She wanted to 'work from home,' learn Italian and better understand the culture. Imagine the orders of magnitude shift in perspective she will be able to bring into her personal life and into her leadership role when this is accomplished. Sure she might miss her next high school reunion party, but she would have a much better ability to generate new ideas, sharpen her focus and create new business opportunities.

Leading with focus is about 'seeing' the world with new eyes to get that next idea. It's about getting your ideas to resonate with as many people as possible. Leading with focus is also enjoying the journey that is your life along the way. Isn't it time you started practicing leading with focus in your organization?



Mark Sincevich works with organizations to develop leaders with more focus and creativity. He does this through a unique photography angle in his speaking programs and writing. Mark's programs on leading with focus help his customers gain a fresh perspective, generate new ideas, sharpen the focus and create more business. Mark is the Chief Perspective Officer of his organization, Leading with Focus, a member of the National Speakers Association and the Executive Director of the Digital Photography Institute. In between assignments, he can be found spending time with his family or writing in cafés with character. Contact Mark at 301-654-3010 or www.leadingwithfocus.com.