

As seen in the January 2007 issue of Washington SmartCEO magazine

The following is excerpted by permission of SmartCEO Publishing for Staash Press



Mark Sincevich

the leadership lens

ON WHAT GOOD PHOTOGRAPHY CAN
TEACH US ABOUT LEADING COMPANIES

By Mark Sincevich

Photography can teach us about leadership. Being extremely accomplished in photography requires passion, self-reflection, risk taking and respect. What makes a photographer successful will also make a leader successful. An example of a prominent photographer was Henri Cartier-Bresson. He captured some of the most memorable street scenes of Paris. He used his patience and creativity to allow for that 'decisive' moment to occur. One of his most famous black and

white photographs shows a man leaping over a large puddle of water in mid-air with the man's reflection caught in the puddle below. His passion attracted students, aficionados, and collectors alike and made him a photography leader.

white photographs shows a man leaping over a large puddle of water in mid-air with the man's reflection caught in the puddle below. His passion attracted students, aficionados, and collectors alike and made him a photography leader.

If a leader doesn't make time for employees, then the employees will begin to lose confidence in the leader's vision and in the organization.

white photographs shows a man leaping over a large puddle of water in mid-air with the man's reflection caught in the puddle below. His passion attracted students, aficionados, and collectors alike and made him a photography leader.

Henri Cartier-Bresson wasn't born with these traits; he developed them as his expertise grew. Warren Bennis, the author of *On Becoming a Leader*, argues that leaders are made. "They possess real convictions – strong feelings that have built up within them over time. If those convictions match the requirements of a group of followers, then great leadership emerges." Gaining knowledge through travel, liberal studies, being exposed to unique and interesting ideas, self-reflection and even adversity allows for these convictions to grow and leadership to emerge. Great leaders aren't watching television nor are they confined to their own backyards. While forging new paths through uncharted territory, leaders must also assuage the hearts and minds of their followers. This might involve staying the course regardless of the danger. Leaders must also have personal

congruity by living a life that is in concert with their vision. They need to 'walk the talk.' According to the Workplace Section of the *Washington Post*, "People leave companies because of the boss. Either the boss is a jerk, doesn't treat the individual right, or won't empower the employee to do the work." Companies where you see leaders spending time with individuals consistently show higher returns to shareholders than those who don't. It is an

inherent desire present in all individuals to be understood and to be appreciated. If a leader doesn't make time for employees, then the employees will begin to lose confidence in the leader's vision and in the organization.

Passion

Before leadership can begin to develop the fundamental trait of passion needs to be present. It's this passion for one's work that can make or break an individual or a company. The more passionate you are the better you can process setbacks.

"You can never have a bad day," says Michael Capellas, the former CEO of MCI. It's how you process setbacks that would normally paralyze others who don't share the same passion for what you do. I remember sitting on the tarmac for almost five hours on a United Airlines flight due to a weather delay. After we landed at our destination, I overheard other passengers bemoaning the flight and vowing never to fly United again. I viewed our delay only as a minor setback. I used the time to take

a nap, get some extra reading done and to write in my journal.

There is both a negative and a positive energy quotient in any given situation. Sometimes you can just feel it, but before you walk into or are confronted with a situation, you need to be committed to having a positive learning experience. When I visited Istanbul, Turkey, I didn't have a map of the city. I thought the cruise ship handed them out to passengers, but there were no maps of the city available. I wanted a unique experience where I could meet the Turkish people outside of the large crowds from a tourist bus. I filled my backpack with extra water, snacks, my camera and extra lenses and headed toward the historic section of the city. I walked over the Gallatin Bridge separating Asia from Europe. I made sure to see the ancient Roman cistern of Emperor Justinian and St. Sofia's Cathedral. I was constantly propositioned by groups of Turkish entrepreneurs who said, 'My Uncle's shop is closed now, but we can open it up just for you.' I said no thanks for the eighth time and continued walking, exploring and taking photographs. I didn't get discouraged, because I am passionate about bringing home 'stories of the people' visited. It's all in how you look at the situation. I brought back some unique experiences and memorable images.

Self-Reflection

Self-reflection helps us clarify our vision. What gives you hope and gets you more excited about the work that you do? Perhaps you need the space to find out. Giving employees this extra space or time is something that Procter and Gamble (P&G) was able to do. After reporting record profits in 2004, P&G rewarded

their 90,000 plus employees with two extra days of vacation or the cash equivalent. Sure this will cost the company many millions of dollars, but cost is the wrong word here. It really is an investment in their employees despite the fact that it may slightly dilute their earnings per share. Can you imagine if each employee took their two extra days and spent the time on personal development? What if they took the time to step away from their responsibilities and thought about what they really wanted to do? Unfortunately, they will never find out if they turn on the television.

According to a recent study, the average American watches seven hours of television per day. According to Expedia's Vacation Deprivation Survey for 2006, Americans gave back \$75.72 billion in unused vacation time that accrues annually, many of these TV people probably swap their extra time off for the cash equivalent to finance the purchase of a bigger television set. It's no wonder that adults are now being diagnosed with ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder). When we don't pay enough attention to what's going on inside of ourselves, we begin to lose our sense of control. Amazing things could happen if we spent some of our free time on personal development and self-reflection instead. By focusing on our own development, it will lead to an increased awareness of our vision.

Risk Taking

Leaders wouldn't be able to fully articulate their vision if they didn't learn from their mistakes along the way. Leaders must operate on the 'edge of known space' otherwise known as the bleeding edge. Operating on the bleeding edge means taking chances and forging a path



Mark Sincevich

where others fear to tread. It's called the bleeding edge for a reason, because if the standard doesn't stick or the product doesn't solve the challenges of the consumer, then the leader might get replaced or the company might go out of business. Taking chances requires an unshakable vision and the ability to create new things (or reinvent the old things). Space Ship One pushed beyond the known limits of commercial aviation by reaching the edge of space, 62 miles above the Earth's atmosphere, twice in two weeks to claim their \$10 Million Ansari-X prize. They took a risk.

Apple Computer pushed beyond the perception of how photographs are stored and shared with its' program iPhoto. It allows the user to produce a professionally bound coffee table book. While they advertise this as a great way to share family photographs, I took it a step further. I introduced my professional photography books as an affordable and attractive way for my customers to remember their events long after they have passed. My clients have purchased dozens of these books. One of my clients, Sheraton Hotels, used their professional photography books as sales tools. They distributed them to their sales associates at one hotel to help their customers and potential customers visualize concepts. With the help of these professional photography books, they secured \$40,000 worth of new business in two weeks.

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. When trying to gain a new customer for the first time, you cannot expect an immediate response. The best approach is to come from an attitude of how you can help them. Given time, they will want to help you too by purchasing your product. 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?" A way to have a solid degree of life experience is to take risks along the way. When we have 'seen enough sunrises,' we will start to have a measure of confidence, and better understand the meaning of things and how to make the best of them.

Respect

Along the way, you must treat people with respect whether that person cleans your bathrooms or sits in the executive chair. When she took over as head of the Washington Post Co., Katherine Graham said, "I was terrified, shy, awkward and socially fearful." However, if you were to interpret her personal humility as a sign of weakness, you would be mistaken. She had the courage to stand up to the Nixon White House and stood behind her reporters. She constantly talked about outside forces and luck and never took credit for having done anything. This means

that the purpose of leadership is far beyond oneself. If you act like the supreme purpose is yourself, then you'll lose focus and followers.

According to an article in *The Wall Street Journal*, "Publicity-hounds like Carly Fiorina



Mark Sincevich

often fail. Good-to-great leaders shun the limelight and quietly focus on the tasks at hand." She launched a \$200 million campaign with commercials featuring her talking about the innovative spirit of HP. Whose brand was she building anyway? During her watch the stock underperformed. This is in sharp contrast to those IBM advertisements featuring real people solving real challenges by using IBM technology.

When I take photographs of people, I try to bring out their best. I often take a photograph of an interesting individual and then smile as I walk past. I smile out of respect and thankfulness for the photograph. Other times, I strike up a conversation and get to know a person before I ask permission to take their portrait. If somebody really didn't want me to take their photograph, I say 'thank you' and move on. It is my hope that my photographs inspire others to learn about the people and places I have visited. I want to encourage the viewer to travel more. When we treat others with respect, have passion for what we do, take time for self-reflection and expect to take risks, the more our leadership grows. The more you understand yourself and rehearse your plan, the better you can articulate your vision to others. At the same time, your vision will take on more value and will attract others to your cause. By constantly sticking to your vision, you'll gain perspective, see the bigger picture and express yourself more fully through a leadership lens.

Mark Sincevich works with people and organizations to increase their communication power through a unique photography angle. He can be reached at www.staashpress.com or info@staashpress.com