


## Leading by Example BY ROBERT GIGNAC

 AS SEASONED PROFESSIONALS, we are often faced with complex decisions about how to guide our careers, and the careers of those who report to us. This process hasn't been made any easier for those of you whose companies are downsizing, rightsizing or re-engineering. For some, career guidance seems to come naturally, for others, I offer the following ideas:

### Teach them to learn

Learning doesn't end when school stops. One of the key things that you must impress upon those new to this field (and even the veterans) is that for all of the requisite knowledge and skill they acquired in school, most of what they know will be obsolete in the next 5 years. Learning requires time and effort, not all of which will be provided on the job. In order to develop professionally, one must give up some personal time. But don't expect employees to go it alone. Your role as a manager requires you to promote employee growth by creating plans for your staff to allow them to grow. The rapidly changing environments in which we work demands that we redefine and adapt our roles within ever-shorter cycles. Those who are capable of being lifelong 'students' will be those best equipped to handle this type of change.

### Tell them what they need to do

MIS people, by their very nature, tend to be task oriented, but they aren't mind readers. A recurring theme in my work with MIS shops is the complaint that MIS staff get little or no direction from above and expectations are not being clearly communicated. "If you don't know where you are going, don't be surprised if you don't get there" is the thought that immediately comes to mind. Do not be fooled into thinking that technology is the savior. I've worked with firms that have no e-mail system, but excellent communication and others that have global e-mail networks and suffer from a severe shortage of information sharing. The communication vision has to come from the top of the department, where the goal-setting process begins. If there are no concrete goals at the departmental level, individuals will no doubt be confused about goals.

### Lead by example

We can't, or shouldn't, expect our staff to do things we don't or won't do personally. And we can't expect others to set and attain goals for themselves if we have no prescribed goals. If we are unenthusiastic

about our role with the company, our staff will not be enthusiastic about their roles. If we don't share information and concerns with our staff, don't expect them to share or be concerned. MIS types often like to work alone, but they don't like to work in a vacuum. The spirit and approach that we take in our own jobs will have a major impact on those who work for us.

### Give them a chance to do things

The best way to develop your staff is to let them take their new skills, along with a clear set of directions, and do something. The process of building and breaking things is the growth process; you can't learn anything if you don't make mistakes along the way. Be prepared to throw away preliminary work as a learning experience. One of our customers stopped development four months into a new project and asked, "What would we do differently if we knew then what we know today?" Six weeks later they had rebuilt everything on a solid foundation for a better system because they were willing to learn from their mistakes. Some will say they can't afford the luxury of doing this - you can't afford not to. Firms that don't afford themselves this 'luxury' end up with inflexible, unmanageable systems that can't handle the changing environments.

### Work with those who want to

It's well known that you can run faster with 10 people who really want to run than with 1 who doesn't, and in today's environment, companies cannot afford the luxury of carrying staff who don't want to go somewhere. Keep in mind that there are two types of people you'll be working with: those who are capable but unwilling, and those who aren't yet capable, but are willing. It is easier to teach the willing to be capable, than to motivate the unwilling. Teach those who are willing to be taught; for those who aren't willing, the alternatives are not pretty.

Even with these ideas as a starting point, it is not easy to be successful. If you become so, there will be people who won't like you, especially those that you may have passed while you were on your journey. That doesn't mean it's not a worthwhile endeavor. In the past, you joined a company, worked hard, stayed loyal, and were taken care of. That is no longer true. The onus is on you to take care of yourself today and stay marketable, because you never know what tomorrow may bring. Encourage the staff in your department to do the same—in the long term, it might be the best thing you do for them. **SBCM**

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