

Successful Leadership Skills
A Newsletter for Real Leaders
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What's Flowing Out Your Open Door?

Your People Are Your Success – Choose Wisely

An excerpt from our upcoming book on healthcare leadership -

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What's Flowing Out Your Open Door?

We were working with a management team a while back helping them find ways to be more productive. We asked them what wastes their time. One of the time wasters they raised was frequent interruptions from staff and peers.

We asked them if this happened even when their office doors were shut. They said, "Yes, people just knock and walk right in." We figured the solution was simple, tell people that when your door is shut that you are busy and not to be interrupted except in true emergencies. The shocked and uncomfortable looks on their faces told us that our "simple" solution was not so simple.

They said, "You don't understand. We have an open door policy in our organization. It is expected that we are all available to everybody at all times."

We have seen this before and have a strong opinion about it. An open door policy seems great in concept. It conjures images of the free flow of information, ideas and collaboration. But, applying it in your real executive world hurts your productivity and the productivity of your team.

One of the best CEO's we have worked with was famously frugal with his time. You knew not to knock on his closed door or call his direct phone line unless there was an absolute emergency.

Instead of a flow of random interruptions, he proactively blocked time to meet with selected people on the most important issues facing his organization. He blocked time to respond to emails and voice mails.

If you bumped into him in the hallway and ran an idea past him instead of taking the time to discuss it right then he would say, "That's interesting. Let's both think some more about it and schedule a time to discuss it in more depth. Please call my assistant and she will put some time on my calendar."

In short, he was the master of his time. His discipline and focus allowed him to accomplish a lot within a reasonable number of hours. He required this discipline and focus from his people. They were all highly productive executives. The organization grew exponentially and thrived through some difficult times in their industry and market.

If you currently have an open door policy or if you simply allow yourself to be interrupted too often we advise that you begin to rethink how you view your value as an executive. Your value is greater than your ability to be constantly available to all those around you. Instead, set your value on the level of your productivity and your organization's productivity on the issues that are most critical to your organization's success.

We encourage you to take control of your time. Turn off any email alerts. Respond to the most important emails on your time frame not when they "ping" you. Let calls go to voice mail, return them when you are ready. Schedule the majority of your meetings and phone calls. Keep extemporaneous meetings to a minimum.

We do not mean that you insulate yourself from others. As a senior executive it is critical that you have a lot of interaction with others. What we advocate is maximizing your control of what you do and when you do it.

So, what is flowing out your open door? A lot of productivity! Time is the ultimate commodity. Do not give any of it away.

Your People Are Your Success – Choose Wisely

We've written many articles that center on how to help your team function to their fullest capacity. Now let's backtrack and talk about HOW to find the right people to make up that all important team.

Your organization is unique and so are the job requirements for each position. Most job descriptions end up being relatively generic and lack the very important, specific qualifications a person must have to be successful in that organization. We call these specific qualifications "unique success requirements". Combined these make up a position's "Unique Success Profile".

We begin by asking the big question...what is specifically required here, right now, at this stage of our development, in this role, working for our individual leaders, etc... to be viewed as successful? These requirements are not just the job description, the job specification, nor abstract behavior or personality traits. Let's be honest, it takes hard and disciplined thinking outside your conventional wisdom to come up with these requirements. Once you have these practical requirements, the next step is to rate them (on a scale from 1-5, 1 being desired and 5 being completely mandatory) based on their how critically important they are. The applicants then get rated against these requirements and you'll be able to see how they line up against the profile.

One CFO that we worked with several years ago was looking for a Director of Financial Planning and Analysis and asked for our help in finding the right fit. It was more urgent than usual because the previous two incumbents had been terminated. We started by asking him what the unique requirements were for this particular position that wouldn't normally show up in a job description. He thought for a moment and then began to tell us about his 100 person Board of Directors who were all heavily involved. So involved, in fact, that the Finance department would get about 15-20 calls per day from Board members. The CFO usually handled these calls, but he was going to be spending half his time away from the office over the next year renegotiating bonds. He thought it critical that the new hire have the capability and good judgment to answer Board questions and give enough information to please Board members without giving away too much or saying the wrong thing. Upon reflection, he also thought that this issue was very heavily involved with the lack of success of the previous incumbents. The CFO then interviewed for that specific quality and found someone who had had experience and skills to deal with a very involved Board.

Unique success profiles are a great instrument not only for hiring, but for making sure you currently have the right people

in the right positions. Sometimes we become enamored by people for the wrong reasons. We think they are superstars at some things, but when it comes down to it, those aren't the things that are most important for that position. When lined up with the unique success profile, people can fall short of the most critical success criteria. Sometimes it is necessary to take a closer look every so often to make sure you have your people in the right place with the best chance of success.

We worked with a large hospital that was going through a merger integration following the acquisition of a major competitor. One of the unfortunate consequences of this combination was that there were 150 current managers for the 75 new leadership positions in the merged company. We suggested and they agreed that they were going to have to conduct interviews for all of them. 75 people were going to have to leave the organization. The senior executives used careful thought in creating the USPs for each position. They then let all applicants know ahead of time what the criteria were and that they would be interviewed for each of the unique success requirements. At the end of the hiring process several people who didn't get the job they had interviewed for said that it was the fairest process they had ever been through. The Board chairman looked through the USP book and said that the process was unassailable. No lawsuits were brought against the organization.

Consider how different their experience was from conventional practice. Usually the managers of the acquiring organization are the 'winners' and the managers of the acquired organization are the 'losers'. Usually selections are made based on comfort and relationship rather than necessary skills against a well thought out requirements list. Usually it is every man for himself rather than a process that put the good of the organization first and treated each candidate as fairly and as honestly as possible. In the end everyone agreed they had done the right things the right way for the right reasons. Most importantly, the process almost insured that the participants would accept the outcome.

The value of this approach and tool are in direct proportion to the quality of the USP and your willingness and discipline to apply it. Considering how challenging it can be to remove a person from their job for being the wrong fit, it is worth putting in the time beforehand to make sure that your organization and your people have the highest probability of success.

An Excerpt From Our Upcoming Book On Healthcare Leadership

The healthcare industry is one of the most complex in the world. We can all benefit from the insights from successful leaders in this business. We are working on a book to do just this. Each month we will share a pearl of wisdom.

Rick Afable, CEO of Hoag Hospital in Newport Beach, CA shared this perspective when we asked how he makes sure he has the right information to make important decisions:

"I believe that the chief executive can know enough about all of the key elements of the organization to be able to have his or her finger squarely on the pulse to be able to ascertain the situation and make good decisions. I have seen from time to time those who say, "I'm really not interested in that or I can not know enough about that, so I'm going to delegate that to somebody else." I think that's unwise personally, especially in an industry like healthcare. There are many other industries that are similar, but in healthcare where things are moving really fast and decisions need to be made pretty rapid fire, some of which can be very large and very significant to the organization, I think you need to know a lot about what's going on.

So the way that I do that is through communication by and through my senior management team. We meet every two weeks as a group. I meet individually with each of the senior managers at least once a month if not twice a month, sometimes even more than that if there's a lot going on in an individual area. I am constantly scanning and looking for information as to what's going on. I need to feel comfortable in each and every area that I have an adequate knowledge of what's happening, and I do. I feel very confident."

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We welcome and encourage you to forward this to as many people as you think will find this interesting.

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