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Are you a leader and find it difficult at times to be consistently effective? Are you frustrated when a leadership tactic works one day but not on another day? Especially when you need it to most? Is the “leader” you are different from the “person” you are? If you’re a frustrated leader, it’s time to end the frustration.

There are no magic formulas when it comes to being a successful leader-- leadership is an individual and personal thing. Every leader develops a unique style. The best advice I can tell you is to “be yourself” and to benefit from the recorded experiences of others.

When I was a young leader, I looked for leadership advice from various sources: from leaders who trekked the path before me, from autobiographies, and from military and leadership schools and academies. One such person who trekked before me was General Louis L. Wilson, Jr., a previous Commander in Chief of Pacific Air Forces. Although he retired from the Air Force in 1977 before I entered the service, I learned quite a bit from this outstanding leader.

Throughout his military career, which began in World War II when he flew P-47 Thunderbolts for General George Patton, General Wilson would journal his leadership successes and failures. I’m not sure where I can find his works now, but during the 1980s, some fellow Air Force professionals shared them with me. His advice was highly effective. In fact, I followed much of it throughout my career and I have to say that everything he preached and wrote about worked quite well for me. Perhaps it can work for you too. Here’s what I learned and how I routinely executed as a leader:

1) *Be tough.* Set your standards high and insist that your people measure up.

Have the courage to correct those who are substandard. In the long run, your people will be happier. Almost certainly morale will be higher, your outfit better, and your people prouder.

2) *Get out from behind your desk.* See for yourself what is going on in your work center. Your subordinates will see that you’re interested in their problems, work conditions, and welfare. Many of your people problems will go away if you practice this point.

3) *Search out the problems.* If you think there are no problems in your organization, you may be ignorant to problems that are not obvious. The trick is to find them. Foster an environment that encourages people to bring problems to you. Otherwise, people will hide problems from you.

4) *Find the critical path to success.* Get personally involved in issues on a priority basis. Let your influence be felt on make-or-break issues in your organization. Avoid the “activity trap” --don’t spend your valuable time on inconsequential or trivial matters. Weigh in where it counts.

5) *Be sensitive.* Listen to your people. Communicate with them and be perceptive to their needs. Learn to recognize problems and seek out ideas. Be innovative. Recognize that effective communication involves shared perceptions. Don’t be afraid to empathize when necessary. Listen, listen, and listen!

6) *Do not take things for granted.* Do not assume things have been fixed --look for yourself. Furthermore, don’t assume problems will stay fixed. The probability is high that “fixed” problems will recur, so regularly monitor your processes.

7) *Do not alibi.* Remember, you and your people will never be perfect.

People will make mistakes, so do not be defensive about things that are wrong. Nothing is more disgusting than the individual who can do no wrong and has an alibi for anything and everything that goes awry.

8) *Do not procrastinate.* Do not put off those hard decisions because you are not willing to make them today; it won’t be any easier tomorrow. This does not mean you should make precipitous or unreasonable decisions just to be prompt. However, once you have arrived at what you believe is correct, get on with it. Do not block progress.

9) *Do not tolerate incompetence.* Once people demonstrate laziness, disinterest, or an inability to get the job done, you must have the courage to terminate their assignments. You cannot afford to do less. On the other hand, when your people are doing good work, recognize it and encourage them. Certainly they will do even better.

10) *Be honest.* Tell it like it is and insist that your people do likewise. They set their behavior patterns based upon your example. There is nothing more disastrous than garbled information, half-truths, and falsifications. Make sure your people know where you stand on a given matter. Encourage them to come to you if they have questions about what is going on in the organization. You must create an atmosphere of trust and confidence. Finally, be honest with yourself--don’t gimmick reports and figures to make things look good on paper.

Advice from a successful leader can be a beneficial tool to the aspiring leader, but where the aspiring leader applies this will determine his or her success. It helps to follow the timeless leadership advice of proven leaders.

~ The End ~