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If you're a top-level leader, how much are you really contributing to your organization? Would your answer be similar as colleagues and subordinates if someone asked them how much you contribute? Hopefully, you are contributing appropriately but if you're not, look up from your work and outward toward goals. It's time to start asking yourself on a routine basis: “What can I contribute that will significantly affect the performance and the results of the institution I serve?”

When doing this, your main focus must be on how effective you are at: 1) your own specific work--its content, its level, its standards, and its impacts; 2) your relations with others --your superiors, your associates, your subordinates; and 3) your use of executive tools such as meetings or reports.

Do not be like some executives who have a tendency to focus downward. Those executives are occupied with efforts rather than with results. They worry over what the organization and their superiors “owe” them and “should do” for them. And they are conscious about all of the authority they “should have.” As a result, they render themselves ineffectual.

It is important to always remember that a person who focuses on efforts and who stresses their downward authority is a subordinate no matter how exalted their title and rank. But someone who focuses on contribution and who takes

responsibility for results, no matter how junior, is in the most literal sense of the phrase, “top management.” This person holds him or herself accountable for the performance of the whole.

When focusing on contribution, executives should turn their attention away from their own specialty, their own narrow skills, their own department, and toward the performance of the whole. Their attention should be aimed outside, to the main place where there are results. Their thinking should be in terms of the customer or the client who, after all, is the ultimate reason for whatever the organization produces, whether it is a product or service.

When an executive asks what he or she can contribute, they are looking for unused potential in the job. And what is considered an excellent performance in a good many positions is often but a pale shadow of the job's full potential of contribution. Executives who don't ask themselves what they can contribute are not only likely to aim too low, they are likely to aim at the wrong things. Above all, they may define their contribution too narrowly.

Every organization, business, or corporation needs performance in three major areas: It needs direct results; building of values and their reaffirmation; and building and developing people for tomorrow. If deprived of performance in any one of these areas, it will decay and die. All three, therefore, have to be built into the contribution of every executive. But their relative importance varies greatly

with the personality and the position of the executive as well as with the needs of the organization.

Direct results normally come first. In the care and feeding of an organization, they play the role calories play in the nutrition of the human body. Second, an organization needs a commitment to values and their constant reaffirmation, as a human body needs vitamins and minerals. There has to be something “this organization stands for,” or else it degenerates into disorganization, confusion, and paralysis. And third, an organization must overcome the limitations mortality sets to what any one man or woman can contribute. If the organization doesn't perpetuate itself, it will most likely fail. Therefore, it has to provide today the men and women who can run it tomorrow. It has to renew its human capital. It should steadily upgrade its human resources. In fact, the next generation should take for granted what the hard work and dedication this generation has accomplished. And ultimately they should then, standing on the shoulders of their predecessors, establish a new “high” as the baseline for the generation after them.

As a top-level leader, you must contribute to the results of your organization or get out of the way of someone else who will contribute. When you set your sights on contribution, you raise the sights and standards of everyone in the organization. So aim high, and the results will parallel that aim.

~ The End ~