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Profit

2/1/2024

Successor? Create Your Own

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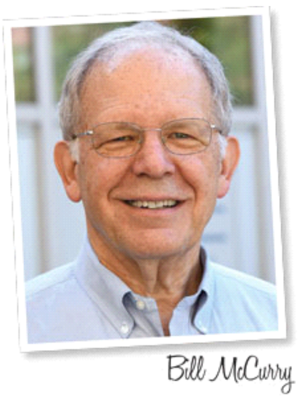

Daniel McCallum worked his way up to general superintendent of the New York and Erie Railroad, utilizing a new form of communication—the telegraph. More importantly, in the mid-1850s he drew the first recognized organization chart. Everyone had clear lines of authority and knew who reported to whom. Anyone could look at it and see where they fit in the organization, what their chain of command was and where others around them fit.

McCallum wouldn't appreciate today's, unfortunately, common wagon wheel organization chart with the boss in the middle and the employees running a wide circle around him/her, dodging responsibilities while looking very busy. This wheel of confusion makes bosses feel important and in control because everyone wants to hear the boss's wisdom and direction. Their email is jammed, text files overflow … and don't think of trying to leave a voicemail. These bosses believe they're all-important while they slowly hemorrhage cash, the company's lifeblood.

These bosses are so insulated they don't see people stymied by a refusal to share, trust and delegate. They think those who're best at bootlicking are also the best employees.

Competent people who want to produce also want to grow, have a meaningful vocation and won't stay long in an environment where the boss rewards only those who look busy over achievement. The kind of person who'll build and lead our industry is the kind of person who wants responsibility, plus the knowledge to use that responsibility wisely. Coordinating with a boss builds a different leader than one who only gets yes/no answers after constantly stopping to ask for the boss's blessing. Those who kowtow are more appreciated by the boss than those who ask hard questions and seek effective growth.

When you can't find leaders, "Nobody wants to work anymore" is the wrong answer. There are people who want to contribute, but only to an organization that values their participation.

Some bosses kill employee/family ambition with the "Woe is me!" mantra. Every comment is a complaint. Rarely do the owner's family or top employees hear about the fun of running a garden center or the joy of happy customers. Continual negativity rubs off on everyone who wants to avoid the perceived terror of taking over the business. Don't discourage people from exploring leadership. Keep a happy face. "All Bad Days for Owners Are Cancelled. Period."

I've had five different clients collapse during meetings. They were out of control, sobbing and/or gasping for air. All had the same underlying cause. A parent who operated the business using the wagon wheel organization method had died prematurely and unexpectedly with no plan for what happens next. There was no heir apparent and no one in the company understood how to manage the business. Other family members had emotionally blackmailed the son/daughter to “Keep Dad’s legacy alive. Quit your job and take over the business.”

None of these five had any business education or competence. All were failing in their new task. Their companies were financially floundering. Additionally, surviving family members, with potential ownership in the business, expected immediate cash payouts. They had no understanding of economic reality and assumed a huge cash windfall would instantly and miraculously come to them. Age-old family disagreements surfaced with members at each other’s throats. Very few had knowledge of the situation or understanding of the importance of cash flow in maintaining a business.

There are multiple steps that must be taken if future generations will avoid this tragedy. A buy/sell agreement among owners is critical. If you don’t have one, make it your major priority. That resolves many of the legal issues. More challenging is the issue of future leadership. Who understands and can manage the uniqueness of your organization? Communication between owner and family must be opened and stay open over the decades. A lack of candid information-sharing almost always guarantees the business will close after a painful and unsuccessful attempt by the heirs who hemorrhaged cash fighting for survival.

Current owners have two options— remain silent and let the family and the business self-destruct after their death or start building understanding and competence now before it’s unexpectedly needed. Build your future leadership starting today!

You must cultivate and teach your leaders. Who on your team should be given more responsibility and have some training/travel dollars allocated to their professional development? Check out *Green Profit’s* Young Retailer program. (Hurry, nominations end March 1). If you don’t have someone on your team worthy of nominating, it speaks volumes about your lack of leadership. I’ve had garden center owners say they don’t want to nominate their good people because they might get hired away. The only situation I know where a Young Retailer nominee left was when the owner did NOT nominate the young person, but someone outside the company did. The young retailer already had his eye on the door. It solidified his decision when he saw how little esteem the boss had for him.

Delegate tasks to promising employees. Coach them, answer their questions and let them learn. A great assignment is visiting SeedYourFuture.org and come up with a recruitment program. It could be a great benefit for your organization while it builds confidence among your future leaders.

Yes, it will take time and patience to grow leaders. “What if I train them and they leave?” isn’t nearly as disastrous as “What if I don’t train them and they stay?” **GP**

Bill would love to hear from you withquestions, comments or ideas for future columns. Please contact him at wmccurry@mccurryassoc.com or (609) 731-8389.