

# LEADERS OPEN DOORS

How creating opportunities and stepping outside your comfort zone can make you a more effective leader BY: DOUGLAS S. CAIN



“THE TASK OF THE LEADER IS TO GET HIS PEOPLE FROM WHERE THEY ARE TO WHERE THEY HAVE NOT BEEN.”

- HENRY KISSINGER

In three decades of serving as president of Lake Truck Lines, I only started taking on the mantle of leadership in the last year. Most of the reason was that I lacked an understanding of whom I should be leading. But that paradigm was permanently shifted when I realized I was not so much an all-powerful owner of a company, but instead, a steward of its assets. From there came the realization that the greatest asset the company had was its employee partners, followed by the realization that my primary role was to lead this company and its employees.

This epiphany resulted in the tasking of the human resources department with building a training program based on our five core values:

1. Honesty
2. Passion and dedication
3. Salesmanship
4. Results orientation
5. Communication

The program was custom built around the core values, the skill sets of the employees and the Lake culture. Five well-known business-management books were chosen by the designer of Lake University (not a real college), Jennifer Webb, who massaged the curriculum

so that it would match the employees and be fun at the same time.

I realized that without participating in the entire 15-month program, I would not be setting the model that I needed for our employees. We all felt that in order for the employees to get what they needed, we needed to know what they wanted. And what we found out is that they all wanted opportunity, security and appreciation. Lake tasks its employees with getting outside their comfort zone each day. I want them to come up with ideas: great ideas, dumb ideas, cheap ideas and expensive ideas (boy, do we get a lot of those). And that is where my job comes in and where the title of this piece comes from.

As your company, department or family leader, are you opening doors to the people around you? Are you creating an environment where there are endless opportunities opening up inside regardless of what is happening outside? Some only look for the opportunities; I challenge you to look at the opportunities that are inside every challenge.

Leadership should be simple, not complex. The opening of Lake U has given me so many opportunities to give opportunities that I'm having trouble deciding where to start. But I knew this: I wanted to fundamentally change the

people who call Lake their home.

“Open-door leaders uplift us,” Bill Treasurer, author of the book, “Leaders Open Doors,” said. “They elevate our standards, ethics and performance by creating opportunities for us to transform ourselves.” To think that you can have an impact on an individual so deeply that you touch their standards and ethics is simultaneously exciting and daunting. A whole lot of change has to happen to be an effective leader.

As Dr. Kissinger said, “The task of the leader is to get his people from where they are to where they have not been.” You have to get people out of where they are comfortable (and perhaps complacent) and into where they are uncomfortable. The executive committee of Lake has tasked itself with finding the “white space” in our industry. White space is that uncharted territory in a market that is untapped and where competition doesn't really exist. Lake U has taken it upon itself to find the white space in each and every employee – that uncharted part of their human spirit where they have never been.

So as you transform yourself, your company or your employees, think way outside your comfort zone. When you look at where you are in your life, be a leader who opens doors. And while you are being that person, lead your employees to a place they have never been. The subject of leadership to your employees is so important that I will dedicate my next two articles to it. Until next time ...

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