The Journey Ahead
Practice Visible Leadership and Increase Employee Engagement

An uninspiring fact we are seeing in businesses now is the isolation of team and/or department leaders, in both genders. It's almost a 'bunker' type seclusion, not just solitude. With many downsizing events, the next promoted for leadership are those that are left. From discussions with our clients we determined there could be several reasons for this behaviour:

- Some are new manager-leaders, so they are trying to become comfortable with different routines and responsibilities. Until they feel grounded, they feel exposed and unprotected. Consequently, you see these leaders separate themselves from their team members, as well as other internal champions that could mentor them.
- Some find that the tasks they used to perform without conscious thought now takes them out of their comfort zone. They have been used to an individual contributor role and had full control of their schedule and delivery timelines. Even though they wanted to move into a management position, they find they can't play it "safe". Others, even their direct boss, is looking at them for effective decision making.
- Or, for some leaders they fear being misunderstood. They have been well liked by co-workers, but now feel their authority is questioned at every decision. They know they have sound strategies for the next company goal, but may not be proficient in communicating those strategies. Hence, they are perceived as controlling and hard headed.

As former Justice Sandra Day O'Connor stated:
"For both men and women, the first step in getting power is to become visible to others; and then, to put on an impressive show. The acquisition of power requires that one aspire to power, that one believe power is possible. As women then achieve power and exercise it well, the barriers fall. That's why I'm optimistic. As society sees what women can do, as *women* see what women can do, there will be even more women out there doing things; and, we'll all be better off for it. Certainly, today women should be optimistically encouraged to exercise their power and their leadership skills wherever it *might* take them."

Being a visible leader provides motivation, increases trustworthiness, provides timely resolution to conflicts, dispels rumors and empty schemes, shows compassion in listening to other viewpoints; and, builds unity among dissimilar departmental teams.

Practices to be visible do require you to get out of your office. Use any of following techniques to increase your leader visibility:

- Visible leaders use positive language between all others demonstrating determination and vigor. After President Franklin Roosevelt's death, Eleanor Roosevelt continued her political career. She served in the United Nations and was instrumental in the creation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Many times, she used positive and declarative language. She stated, "It isn't enough to talk about peace. One must believe in it. And it isn't enough to believe

in it. One must work at it." Her determination and language use made others examine their commitment to this same cause.

- Don't hold back your emotional connectedness to the vision, the project, or the venture. People become energized by the vital force you present and what you will risk to realize your efforts in the final success. Both Martin Luther King Jr. and Cesar Chavez relied on their emotional intensity to fuel campaigns for justice.
- Skilled visible leaders understand the power of their presence, staying observable as much as possible. Their teams stay motivated when they see their efforts directly supported by their leader. Remember the effect Patrick Swayze had when he appeared on TV with the **Stand Up to Cancer** campaign, exhilarating.
- According to a Gallup study, it proved that genuine and sincere engagement helped develop high-performing teams. The report also stated how leaders engaged the hearts and minds of personnel by visiting their work sites and individual work teams. By circulating among different departments, they exchanged other best practices helping improve working techniques. And, they didn't appear at the same time every day or every week. Consequently, they didn't see the same old routines to problem solving. Visible leaders let others be brilliant too.
- Visible leaders do not live in blame mode. When they visit various teams, they do not show up for fault finding. They let others know their work matters to the bottom line and is appreciated. These leaders do not find it hard to say *thank you*. An example of a global 'thank-you' is, a giant gratitude card that tours Australia during the "Thank You" Day campaign, stopping for high profile media events in each state and territory. The card collects the signatures of well-known Australians and leading researchers for children and adults who have benefited from medical research.

When you want to improve your leadership visibility, *ask* yourself:
- What your commitment to fulfill the company mission and have you communicated that clearly to your team?
- When you are in a specific department what will be the guidelines for conflict resolution when one person is pushing their single idea? Is this guideline practiced by all teams?
- What experiential exercise can you have your colleagues engage in for curiosity and courage, igniting the idea of 'what if', 'why not', or 'what can we create with what we have'?
- What measurements have you put in place to gauge your progress at visibility? Will you have feedback sessions with peers?

"The power of visibility can never be underestimated."
Margaret Cho

If this resonates with your current situation, we invite you to realize your efforts with us.