

Teachers at the Top

By Harold Chapman

TEACHER

The spirit of a teacher should be at the heart of every great leader. Every one of us may be able to recall that certain someone in our lives, personally or professionally, who poured into our lives and helped us become the persons we are today. With that being said, if we have people in leadership roles who can't teach, we cannot expect them to develop their people well. We must have leaders who understand our principles and philosophies and TEACH those principles and philosophies to others. One of the most long living legacies we can achieve is passing on our knowledge to those we teach. Teaching is a huge responsibility since, as teachers, our stance must be to understand that if the student hasn't learned, then the teacher hasn't taught. It is our responsibility to ensure learning happens. That is not the role of those being taught. We must promote teachers, not those leaders who get results based on pure brute force. Teachers ensure that we are spreading our knowledge and becoming more of a learning organization.

THREE MAIN WAYS

At Drive Inc., we teach that there are three main ways to learn or teach new skills: Hear-See-Do, Mutual Learning, and Socratic Method. In Hear-See-Do, we tell the team about what can be done, so they HEAR it. Then we show the team examples of what has been done, so they SEE it. Finally, we roll up our sleeves and help the team DO it in their processes. Getting the improvement work done requires a team who is willing and able to do the work. We call this the DO CREW, and there must always be a DO CREW if we are going to get things done. That DO CREW should not just be hourly or staff folks. We, as leaders, must get in there as well. We don't want to do transformation TO the team, but rather do transformation WITH the team. In the Mutual Learning method, we learn from each other. In Mutual Learning, we take the approach that everyone is a teacher in that we all have understanding to share with one another. Let's LEARN and move forward TOGETHER. Roger Schwarz is a pioneer of Mutual Learning, and he has written many books and articles on the subject. However, there are many other authors' articles and books on this topic to discover. Finally, there is the Socratic Method. This method involves teaching someone something new by asking questions that lead the learner to an answer. By having that person discover the answer on his/her own, the lesson is forever embedded in his/her mind. Our leaders must embrace these learning and teaching models, and they must demonstrate those models daily to their team members. One of the best things a coach can say is, "I don't know, what do you think?" There is a chance no one has ever asked the team member that question.

ALIGNMENT

Yet another benefit of teaching is the alignment that comes within our teams once our expectations are clearly communicated. Teams will do what is expected of them in most cases.



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ALIGNMENT, CONTINUED...

However, too often we pay our team members for attendance rather than performance. Members are working to appear busy but aren't being productive. When the boss is coming, imperatives such as "Get busy. The boss is coming," might be heard. This is the result of years of bad management telling the employees to stay busy. If the work the employees are doing isn't going to add value to the current item or the next one in line, the personnel shouldn't be doing it. Allowing people to simply stay busy rather than productive will result in piles of inventory between processes. This is over production. As we have discussed in previous newsletters, over production is the worst form of waste since it creates all of the other forms of waste.

PROBLEM SOLVING

One of the most important skills we can teach our staff is effective problem solving. It is critical to introduce a structured problem solving method in such a way that 100% of the organization will understand and practice it from the very beginning. This will always begin at the top and include the top leader. Once the top administration has demonstrated proficiency, they can, in turn, train the next level. This process will continue until everyone in the organization is using a standardized method to solve problems. The leaders in the organization from Team Leader to CEO are expected to coach and hold others accountable to this process.

This structured problem solving method will encourage the use of the Plan Do Check Act (PDCA) cycle, which is also known as the Scientific Method. It ensures we are constantly trying to improve our processes. We perform mini-experiments daily, hourly, and even after each cycle. Failure is a chance to learn as much as success is. It is acceptable to let the team fail (within reason, of course) as long as a valuable lesson is learned in the process. Are you willing to let your team fail? How have you responded in the past when the team has failed? We are constantly learning from and improving our processes. The first attempt at PDCA in an area will begin with the CHECK to see if there are standards. The results of that check will determine our action. We will act to create standards if standards are not present, solve the problems keeping us from achieving the established standards, or raise the standards currently in place to ensure continuous improvement. Some people like to jump straight to improvement without fully understanding the current condition. We can't have improvement without standardization. Standardization IS Improvement if no standards exist.

Do you have teachers at the top? Are you teaching the team the right skills in the right manner? If you answered no to either of these questions and are looking for a partner who can help. Drive Inc. has years of experience working with leaders to develop a teaching style of leadership. For a no obligation introduction meeting, please contact Paul Eakle at paul.eakle@driveinc.com or 865-323-3491.

