
LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS: LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE ELECTION

We can learn a lot from the U.S. presidential campaign that concluded recently. Here are a few of the leadership issues and ideas we see emanating from the campaign that we feel are worth reflecting upon and perhaps considering vis-à-vis your own leadership situation.

1. **Never underestimate your competitor.**

Even if you and your organization are the big fish in your pond, always be aware that your competitor also has something to offer. That is why she is in your pond. Take the time to really know what your competitor is offering and why it is successful. Don't fall into the trap of thinking you completely know the pond, your competitor, and your customers, and have nothing to learn. Circumstances have a way of changing.

2. **Intimately understand your customers' problems.**

Provide a vision or a pathway to "solutions." Have you ever shadowed your customers, spending a day following around one of your customers, understanding the everyday problems your customer faces? *His* supply line, *his* quality issues, *his* customer issues, *his* employee issues. It is easy to think you know what your customer wants, but even if you were initially correct, his needs probably have changed over time.

3. **Connect emotionally with your customer.**

Customers want to know that you understand their needs, but more than that, that you care about helping them satisfy those needs.

4. **Less is more.**

Leading a large organization does not necessarily require a large leadership team or administrative group. Small leadership teams can achieve outstanding results if they are cohesive and tightly focused. In fact, sometimes a larger group may have the tendency to become bureaucratic and splintered, setting up barriers to action.

5. **Understand your impact on others.**

A wise leader understands that her credibility as an effective leader is related to the degree she understands her impact on those around her. See our article [Understanding Your Impact](#).

6. **Know and network.**

Know who your stakeholders are and network well with them. We have heard this many times in all kinds of different contexts – getting a job, keeping a job, progressing in an organization, collaborating seamlessly with peers, and even keeping one's health. These are some of the many reasons we keep hearing about the value of building relationships through networking. You may not always know when you will need support from your peers/stakeholders.

7. **People's perceptions are their reality.**

Lastly, remember that the impression you leave with people – accurate or not – will be their reality. Perceptions are hard to shake. A perception can be formed "in the heat of the moment" and that perception will drive future perceptions, actions, and feelings.

The election raised additional issues, the outcomes of which are unclear. We'll be talking about these issues in future editions of *Breakaway Performance*.

What lessons have you learned from recent political events that might help you become a better leader? What can you do to ensure you really understand your own impact, your competitors, customers, stakeholders, and team?