

LEADERSHIP ESSENTIALS



A NWS SR Newsletter promoting BLAST and the principles of leadership

Volume I, Issue 1, July, 2004

A CULTURE OF COMMITMENT BY HERB KELLEHER

Former CEO, Southwest Airlines

What's the secret to building a great organization? How do you sustain consistent growth, profits, and service in an industry that can literally change overnight? And how do you build a culture of commitment and performance when the notion of loyalty - on the part of customers, employees, and employers -- seems like a quaint anachronism? I can answer basically in two words: be yourself.

That is both a simple and a profoundly difficult goal. It means spending less time benchmarking best practices and more time building an organization in which personality counts as much as quality and reliability. It also means cultivating an ability to embrace paradox.

But you can't just lead by the numbers. We've always believed that business can and should be fun. At far too many companies, when you come into the office you put on a mask. You look different, talk different, act different -- which is why most business encounters are, at best, bland and impersonal. But we try not to hire people who are humorless, self-centered, or complacent, so when they come to work, we want them, not their corporate clones. They are what makes us different, and in most enterprises, different is better.



Southwest Airlines Boeing 737

Culture Defines Personality

A financial analyst once asked me if I was afraid of losing control of our organization. I told him I've never had control and I never wanted it. If you create an environment where the people truly participate, you don't need control. They know what needs to be done, and they do it. And the more that people will devote themselves to your cause on a voluntary basis, a willing basis, the fewer hierarchs and control mechanisms you need.

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WELCOME TO "LEADERSHIP ESSENTIALS" A BLAST NEWSLETTER BY JODY JAMES, LBB

Welcome to the Southern Region BLAST newsletter. This is the first edition of what we hope will be a long-running leadership forum. This idea originated from members of the BLAST 2004 Class. After Atlanta, we felt it was important to find a way to bring some of the leadership topics discussed at the BLAST Workshop home to the local offices.

After some discussion, most of us agreed that a bi-annual or quarterly newsletter promoting leadership topics would serve to raise awareness and communicate the importance of good leadership. We later assembled a team, collected content, and you are currently reading our first edition.

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A CULTURE OF COMMITMENT

BY HERB KELLEHER

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We're not looking for blind obedience. We're looking for people who on their own initiative want to be doing what they're doing because they consider it to be a worthy objective. I have always believed that the best leader is the best server. And if you're a servant, by definition you're not controlling.

Personality Is Strategy

Rather than trying to predict what we'll do, we try to define who we are and what we want. I have seen brilliant entrepreneurial strategies falter as an organization grows and matures. Obviously, you manage a \$25 billion company differently than you do a \$25 million company. But you change your practices, not your principles. You learn how to communicate with large numbers of employees by using videotapes, newsletters, weekly updates, frequent visits to the field. You share not only what's going on in the company, but in the industry and the marketplace. You are careful that people don't preoccupy themselves with cosmetic things like offices and titles. You delegate more and more, and make yourself available as a troubleshooter. You go to meetings not to issue orders or instructions; you go to learn the problems people are having and to see if you can help. You remember that systems are not masters -- they're servants in helping you carry out your mission. And that nothing comes ahead of your people.

If you take an ongoing, genuine interest in the well-being of your people, outside as well as inside the workplace, you eventually create trust. That leads to things like our extraordinary pilots contract, with the pilots taking stock options for five years instead of pay increases. (To show good faith, I also took a five-year wage and bonus freeze.) But that kind of community building is not formulaic; if you try to program it, you destroy it.

Building Employee Partnership

But it's not enough to try to assure people a job; equally important is allowing them to

feel liberated when they come to work, to be creative, to think outside the lines. To foster problem solving and cooperation, for example, we have the Walk a Mile program, in which any employee can do somebody else's job for a day. The operations agents cannot fly the planes, but the pilots can -- and do -- work as operations agents. (They also, on their own, have held barbecues for all our mechanics, to thank them for keeping our planes flying.) It's an administrative nightmare, but one of the best tools I know for building understanding and collaboration.

Our most important training is not in how to manage or administer but in how to lead. Training is another way you forge committed partnership. Naturally, an airline must train every employee, but our most important training is not in how to manage or administer but in how to lead. Originally that training was part of our pilots' crew-resource management program; it focused on how the first officer and the pilot relate to each other, how they exchange information, and how they focus on the task at hand. In short, how they work as a team. Today we have reservation sales agents, flight attendants, mechanics, administrative staff in those classes, as well as the cockpit crews.

My best lesson in leadership came during my early days as a trial lawyer. Wanting to learn from the best, I went to see two of the most renowned litigators in San Antonio try cases. One sat there and never objected to anything, but was very gentle with witnesses and established a rapport with the jury. The other was an aggressive, thundering hell-raiser. And both seemed to win every case. That's when I realized there are many different paths, not one right path. That's true of leadership as well. People with different personalities, different approaches, different values succeed not because one set of values or practices is superior, but because their values and practices are genuine. And when you and your organization are true to yourselves -- when you deliver results and a singular experience -- customers can spot it from 30,000 feet. ■

“I have always believed that the best leader is the best server. And if you're a servant, by definition you're not controlling.”

Herb Kelleher



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See their website at: www.pfdf.org

AN INSIDE LOOK AT THE ATLANTA BLAST EXPERIENCE BY JEFF CUPO, MAF

One of the few truly empowering experiences one can have in the National Weather Service is the annual BLAST program. Few opportunities afford so many rewards. Not only are the participants tooled to become today's most effective leaders, but also the bonds this week-long workshop forms are the grounds for improved future leadership within the NWS community.

Despite the schedule conflicting with the much-anticipated Super Bowl, I ultimately felt this was the far more rewarding experience. The lessons learned at BLAST 2004 will serve the participants for the rest of their lives.

From the moment the participants arrived in Atlanta, the casual atmosphere was a welcoming sight and laid the groundwork for new relationships. Many reticent newcomers quickly felt at ease as time passed and we all came to understand this unique experience.

The first step towards improving our lines of communication came before the program even began. Each of us was given a personality test, which would ultimately classify us as any combination of extrovert, introvert, pragmatic, analytical, controlling, adaptive, emotive or intuitive/imaginative personality traits. Later, when Dr. Norma Barr supplied us with interpretations of our personality tests, we held various exercises to learn more about the differences in how we process and respond to others.

One of the most rewarding parts of the retreat was the introductory exercise, wherein the participants each took turns sharing a little about themselves and what brought them to BLAST. Far from being relegated to the typical "Hi! My name is Bob" approach to introductions, this was an opportunity for each of us to really talk about ourselves in depth.



Downtown Atlanta skyline

The workshop facilitators were instrumental in fostering a sense of understanding. Understanding that goes beyond words to the core of each individual where we can truly comprehend each other's processes, motivations and aspirations. One facilitator in particular, Crystal Williams, really reached her audience by some very dynamic and insightful exercises. She managed to wrest true understanding from each of us with the simplest means. One activity involved a video we watched wherein all persons with blue eyes were segregated and demeaned in a manner similar to the discrimination faced by African-Americans. This really seemed to have a genuine impact upon each of the participants.

As simplistic as the axiom may seem, "treat others as you would want to be treated" was the ultimate truism instilled in us during the BLAST workshops. It's the understanding that true leadership is not didactic but rather, through empathy, encourages each individual to be his or her best: to use their individual skills and processes to the fullest in pursuit of the common goal. It is with this understanding that each of us can bring the NWS to the forefront of government in the twenty-first century.

QUARTERLY QUOTE

"Everything that we see is a shadow cast by that which we do not see."

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
The Measure of a Man, 1958



WELCOME TO LEADERSHIP ESSENTIALS - A BLAST NEWSLETTER

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“...the primary aim...
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in life.”

We had many purposes in mind in developing the concept and focus of this leadership newsletter, but the primary aim was and is to promote leadership - not just leadership in the NWS, but leadership in life. As we learned in Atlanta, we are all students of leadership. One can be a leader not only in his or her profession, but also in local community and civic organizations, Little League, church, and in a multitude of other ways.

This newsletter will be a vehicle which will allow an exchange of information about various topics related to leadership, and will give NWS personnel in the Southern Region a closer look at the BLAST (Building Leaders for a Solid Tomorrow) program, both at the regional and the local level. I think I can speak for our entire BLAST class, and likely for previous BLAST students, in saying that the BLAST experience is a unique one that challenges your conventional way of thinking. It forces you to take a close look at yourself and those around you, and it ultimately allows you to see yourself in a new light - one with you making a difference.

As mentioned in the BLAST section of the Southern Region website, “The National Weather Service is at a crossroads. Technology is changing at a rate unequaled in the history of the organization, and customer/partner needs are evolving at a rate commensurate with the rapid technological advances. Within the NWS, local offices are at the forefront of using the latest technology and science to better serve the American people. Accordingly, the rapidly changing world of today and tomorrow will directly link the future health of the

agency with the ability of local office leaders (both official and unofficial) to use change to better serve local customers and partners.” Our vision for this newsletter is to further these ideals, give you the reader a fresh look at leadership topics, and show examples of leadership in action.

On behalf of the BLAST 2004 class, and the BLAST newsletter team, we would like to thank all of the BLAST Program Leaders, Facilitators, and Guests who have worked diligently to make BLAST what it is today. We would especially like to thank Bill Proenza, Steven Cooper, and Gary Grice for their vision of what leadership training could become in our small corner of the Federal workforce. Their insight and imagination have made a real difference in the Southern Region of the National Weather Service. Lastly, I would like to thank my fellow team members for their dedication to this project. Their enthusiasm and energy made my job as team leader easy.

In closing (newsletter articles seem to do that too quickly as we have learned), we hope you enjoy “Leadership Essentials.” If a few are inspired by topics within, or become motivated to further develop their leadership skills, we will have accomplished our purpose. ■



COMING SOON!- COOL STUFF ON SR INTRANET

For “best practices,” innovative local office initiatives, and just plain neat stuff that other offices are doing, click on the Cool Stuff logo (shown right) on the SR Intranet, affectionately known as the “Red Web.”



BOOK REVIEW - FROM WORST TO FIRST BY GORDON BETHUNE

Review by Kerry Jones, ABQ

You know the drill. You're at a party, family gathering, having lunch with friends, etc. when someone asks "Hey, read any good books lately?" If you're like me, you usually offer up the title of a bargain-shelf mystery novel that consumed the better part of a weekend (weekdays for us shift-workers). Now I admit my rating scale doesn't involve little stars. Rather, I consider a book really good if I'm savoring each line beneath a dimly lit headlamp at 3 a.m.. Admittedly, my list of "good" books is not overflowing with management/leadership titles but I have recently added to it *From Worst to First*, Gordon Bethune's story of Continental Airline's comeback in the late 1990s.

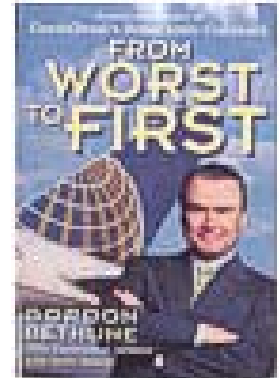
With the help of co-author/editor Scott Huler, Continental Airlines CEO Gordon Bethune describes how he transformed a struggling, nearly bankrupt airline in the mid 1990s into a leader of the industry in less than 3 years. Bethune takes the reader behind the scenes providing a fascinating play-by-play of how he and key advisors organized and carried out his transformation plan - the Go Forward Plan.

With chapter titles like "Fly to Win" or "You Can Make a Pizza So Cheap Nobody Wants to Eat It," and "Working Together - Which Part of This Watch Don't You Think You Need", the book is smartly written using simple, down-to-earth language and plenty of well placed stories and real-life examples drawn from Bethune's own aviation background. He is a licensed commercial pilot. *From Worst to First* is a how-to-book in many respects; describing Bethune's successful efforts to reverse financial woes at Continental, heal failing company-creditor relations, and motivate employees through teamwork concepts and incentive pay programs. However, at its core, the book is really a story about strong

leadership. Many wonderful examples of good leadership are found throughout the book. Above all, Bethune emphasized the importance of employee morale, customer service (not that the customer is always right) and the product itself. This shows that with any transformation, be it small or large or in the private or public sector, there is a lot more to a successful turnaround than simply controlling cost.

Among my favorite leadership examples in the book is when Bethune uses a compass to illustrate how to encourage not stifle employee creativity. "Our team goal is to head west," Bethune writes. One person may go off on a heading of 280 degrees while another at 240 degrees. While individuals may move in different directions, the upshot is that the team as a whole is headed in a westerly direction. That's looking at the big picture. An effective leader provides structure and establishes boundaries and empowers employees to make their own decisions regarding how best to move a plan or project forward. Encourage employee creativity at every turn and don't dwell on minor details. Bethune put it another way, "If your floor is so clean you can eat off it, you may be paying too much attention to your floors."

Although Bethune may come across bigheaded and at times repetitious summarizing each new step of his Go Forward Plan, *From Worst to First* is an easy read that our BLAST '04 class would highly recommend. If nothing else, it would be interesting to see how many of the anecdotes and ideas Bethune presents in the book can be applied directly at your local team or office.



"Bethune takes the reader behind the scenes providing a fascinating play-by-play of how he and key advisors organized and carried out his transformation plan - the Go Forward Plan. "



See the **BLAST** section
of the Southern Region
website at
[www.srh.noaa.gov/srh/
blast/blast.htm](http://www.srh.noaa.gov/srh/blast/blast.htm)

If you are interested in contributing to this newsletter, please contact a member of the BLAST Newsletter team, listed at the bottom of this page.

LOCAL BLAST HIGHLIGHT WFO AMARILLO, TX

BY MARK FOX, AMA



“WFO Amarillo's local BLAST program hosts a movie night for the entire office...to expand learning of leadership topics... to get everyone together in non-weather situations and improve the closeness of the office”

WFO Amarillo's local BLAST program hosts a movie night for the entire office. The idea behind movie night is to simply get everyone together and watch a movie. The movies that are to be shown are picked by the members of the local BLAST and exemplify a leadership topic.

This is a way to have a fun night with coworkers, but also to have a chance to live leadership. One of the goals of movie night is to expand learning of leadership topics with members of the office who do not normally attend the local BLAST meetings. A secondary goal of movie night is to get everyone together to help improve the closeness of the office.

On the first movie night, the movie "Apollo 13" was shown. This movie was chosen to highlight the need to listen to others, to think outside of the box and create new solutions, and to show that the team concept can and does work. The second movie night is scheduled to be a documentary made by The History Channel, called "Failure Is Not an Option." This is a documentary which covers the people who worked Mission Control during the Apollo 13 flight, as well as numerous other Apollo missions.

Steve Drillette, Warning and Coordination Meteorologist at WFO AMA, said "Movie night is a great way to get everyone together to step outside the sometimes stressful office environment and have some fun. At the same time, this also gives a chance to grow relationships within the staff, which could help during potentially stressful times on shift."

LEADERSHIP ESSENTIALS

**This newsletter brought to you by the 2004 BLAST Class,
and the BLAST Newsletter Team**

Team Leader/Editor - Jody James, Senior Forecaster, WFO Lubbock, TX
BLAST Newsletter Team - Jeffrey Cupo, SOO, WFO Midland, TX
Mark Fox, General Forecaster, WFO Amarillo, TX
Kerry Jones, Senior Forecaster, WFO Albuquerque, NM
Ed Calianese, WCM, WFO Lubbock, TX