



An Attitude Adjustment

BY RICHARD MARTIN

My latest work has brought home once again the fundamental importance of leadership, morale, motivation, and passion to achieving great things.

I was recently a workshop lead and mentor for a 2-day conference with the Quebec Technology Association, helping leaders and the executive teams of selected member companies gain a deeper understanding of their competitive, organizational, and strategic trends, opportunities, threats, and risks.

Now, you might think that working with a group of tech firms, everything from highly specialized software developers to enterprise IT consultancies, would be focussed mainly on technical issues. It turned out instead that what really interested these entrepreneurs and leaders, all trying to succeed and thrive in highly competitive markets, was how to attract, retain, and motivate the very best people.

The words that kept coming back again and again were “attitude,” “motivation,” “teamwork,” “passion.” This really came to the fore during the second workshop, when participants had to identify their three biggest needs to ensure survival and success. The first ones to come out were straightforward and unsurprising. “We need access to capital.” “We need R&D and innovative products and services.” Of course! But then someone said, “I think sound health is a major advantage.”

After that, the discussion turned to why this was important to that participant. It turns out that many people have health problems they must deal with. They also have any number of other challenges on their plate at any one time. To quote Gilda Radner’s SNL character Roseanne Roseannadana: “It’s always something.” Indeed.

The real issue is not whether we have perfect health, unlimited capital, or a continuous stream of good ideas. It’s whether we can generate these or, barring full success and satisfaction, how to push on despite setbacks, obstacles, competition, personal problems, and myriad other complications. Contrary to New Age bromides, the universe does not want to help us. It just is.

PASSION, MOTIVATION AND ATTITUDE

This is where passion, motivation, and attitude come into their own. We need a vital passion to motivate us, an intriguing vision to mobilize ourselves and our troops, and sustained will to carry the mission through to completion, despite the odds and countervailing pressures. It helps us to ride the trends and waves to success.

More often than not, however, we have to create our successful conditions by building support and enablers over time. The most important one is having the right people “on the bus,” as pointed out by Jim Collins in *Good to Great*. But once you have the ones with the right stuff, you have to mobilize them and direct them with a compelling vision, mission and strategy. It’s not enough to get them aboard. You have to get the results to survive and thrive.



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Getting back to the workshop discussion, I replied to the entrepreneur who mentioned health as a vital need, “If you learned tomorrow morning that you had a grave health problem, would you quit your business?” The answer came quickly and surely, “Of course not!”

That just proves how important a labour of love can be to someone who is in business. Furthermore, that is the secret to having the right people on your team. We agreed that knowledge can be acquired and skills learned, practised and developed—at least assuming a reasonable level of aptitude. But when it comes to attitude, there is simply no substitute for a willingness to contribute, to engage, to get motivated. In other words, to be passionate about the company’s or organization’s success.

This lesson was brought home to me again over the last few months as I conducted management and communication training for municipal-level public works managers and foremen. It’s all about leadership, especially “mobilizing” leadership. It’s confirmed for me that the most critical skill to be developed is what I call “leading from the inside out.”

Research and experience have demonstrated time and again that money, perks, bonuses, and other extrinsic rewards (not to mention punishments) only have a short-lived effect, if any at all. It’s intrinsic motivation that counts, the kind that comes from people’s enthusiasm for the organization’s vision and mission. The belief that they can make a difference to the company’s customers and contribute to the company’s success. The satisfaction that comes from work well done that pushes one’s limits and challenges to rise to the occasion.

Whether it’s in the tech sector, defence, manufacturing, aerospace, electronics, or whatever, the real secret to achieving great things, is passion and the right people with the right attitude.

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