BY **JEFFREY D. BLACKWELL** DELOITTE APPLICATION STUDIOS

In the 20 years since I graduated from Baylor, I have had the privilege of working with various different leadership styles. As I reflect back, I realize my leadership style is really a mashup of the best qualities of those leaders. Some gave me terrific insight into what leadership is all about and others demonstrated to me what not to do. Surveying the bookshelf in my study, I note many different books on leadership. Some are process-focused, others are people-focused and others say leadership is more of an art than a science. At the end of the day, I have developed some core tenets that guide me in making decisions on a day-to-day basis. Call it my leadership playlist.

1

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

I like to think of myself as a servant leader. It would be interesting to survey my teams and see if they share the same perspective. I try to invest in the development of individuals I lead. I try to be inclusive and build consensus when appropriate, versus leading in an authoritarian matter. I like to give people a choice in what happens to them at work. I want them to own their careers and to realize that I am there to help them progress. At the end of the day, if you don't have a devoted team of people you value helping you to achieve your goals, what exactly are you leading? Those leaders I have worked with who maintain a "win at all costs" approach often leave bodies in their wake. While their projects may be successful, is the toll worth it?

2

MAKE THEM PART OF THE PROCESS

I make sure I have a career discussion at least twice per year with my team members. I want to understand their aspirations. Where do they see themselves in five years? This affords me a couple of luxuries: First, I can ensure that annual goals not only align with organizational goals, but also help people develop in areas that take them toward their next career step. Secondly, I am able to be strategic as to the projects they work on. Can I provide a stretch opportunity for someone? Can I allow someone to try out a new technology? Can I test someone to see if they are ready for a promotion?

I often have discussions with people and allow them to have a hand in what happens to them. I sometimes give them a choice of which projects to work on and explain why I am assigning them to a particular team. I want people to feel empowered over their career and what happens to them at work. This enhances performance, versus making them feel like they have no choice in their work assignments.

3

EMPOWER PEOPLE AND TEAMS

I prefer a more collaborative approach, rather than an autocratic top-down style. As a senior leader, it is not my job to actually write code or develop project plans. My job is to build high-performing teams (through internal or external hiring) and empower them to be successful.

WHAT DOES EMPOWERMENT LOOK LIKE?

LET TEAMS MAKE DECISIONS AND DETERMINE OUTCOMES What do they want the project to look like? How should it be organized? What approach should be taken?

FLY AIR COVER I allow teams to fail or take calculated risks, because they know I have their back with senior management.

INFLUENCE OTHER EXECUTIVES I work my network of peers and superiors toward a pre-agreed outcome decided by the team.

REMOVE OBSTACLES I use my business card and position to remove obstacles that could be people- or process-related.

GARNER RESOURCES I engage individuals in other channels, or outside contractors, to help solve problems or accelerate projects.

MANAGE DIFFICULT CUSTOMERS I help negotiate outcomes with customers. Sometimes this looks like flying air cover, other times it is owning a problem and taking accountability for the team's actions.

By empowering teams, you are gaining their commitment to the vision, the destination and the journey. Team members understand their role and the value they add when they come to work each day. Studies show that when individuals understand how their role fits into the overall direction and strategy of an organization, employee happiness increases, leading to increased performance.

4

IT'S OK TO NOT HAVE THE ANSWER

As a leader, you may think you must always have the answer for all situations. Sometimes, through years of experience, you do. At other times, you may not. This is where relying on your teams is critical. If you have done your job of building a high performing team, it is reasonable to leverage them in gaining consensus around the approach to a project or a solution to a particular problem.

This is also a situation where a strong internal and external network pays off. Don't be afraid to get other opinions on how to handle particular issues. You may have to change some details, but you should be able to have open and honest conversations with peers about how to approach a particular problem.

5

WORK YOURSELF OUT OF A JOB

Many leaders stake a great deal of their value and perception of personal worth in their title or current role. They can become very defensive and want to ensure that everyone around them knows their value proposition or that they are the reason their projects are successful. Ironically, it is these self-serving approaches that actually diminish success.

As a leader, you need to surround yourself with individuals that are smarter, harder working and better equipped than you are. Once you have built this team, it is your job to develop them. This is accomplished through a concerted effort around performance planning, performance evaluation and day-to-day coaching and feedback.

Many leaders do not like dealing with the "soft side" of things such as performance management, but this is where the true value of a leader lies to an organization. By helping people establish appropriate goals, holding regular performance discussions, and providing honest and timely performance feedback, you are, in essence, creating the next generation of leadership and demonstrating your worth as a leader to your organization. Failure to do so will result in a short-lived tenure in the leadership chair.

6

BUILD A BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Do you have a group of individuals, both personally and professionally to function as a sounding board? This could be a mentor, a trusted family member, someone from church, or a friend from college. It doesn't matter where they come from, but you should assemble a group of individuals that you can float career opportunities off of, share struggles at home or at work, share dreams and aspirations, or just check in to get an outsider's perspective. You can meet with these people individually or in a small group. The key to success here is to make sure these are trusted individuals who will give you an honest opinion and will hold your discussions in confidence. While this may seem daunting, a group of advisors is paramount for your professional success and personal accountability.

What's on your playlist? Remember, playlists, by their very nature, are dynamic (songs come in and out of favor) and everyone's choice of songs is unique to them. Your leadership playlist should be, also. Continue to add, remove and alter your style and techniques as you grow in your life and career.

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