

By The Book Leadership

When someone tells you that a specific leader goes “by the book”, what do you think about the leader? If you are like me, you generally picture a person who is consistent and predictable. As a general rule the expression “by the book” is meant as a positive compliment to the individual.

Many of us joined organizations a number of years ago and the sage advice given to us about getting ahead was:

- a) Work hard;
- b) Keep your nose clean;
- c) Don't develop 'stick fingers';
and above all
- d) Go by the book.

I am not in any way suggesting that this was bad advice for the day or even for today. However, the last piece of advice has taken on quite a different meaning in the last five to ten years.

Think about all the self-help books you have heard about or read. Perhaps they include some or all of the following:

- o Stephen Covey's – Seven Habits of Highly Effective People
- o Lorne C. Plunkett & Guy A. Hale's – The Proactive Manager
- o Deborah Tannen's – Talking from 9 – 5
- o Jim Collins' – Good To Great
- o Ken Blanchard & Sheldon Bowles' – Gung Ho!
- o Ken Blanchard & Jesse Stoner's – Full Steam Ahead

The titles quoted above are all great books. These publications contain wonderful ideas from getting yourself organized; learning how men and women communicate; to getting teams organized for success. The fault often lay not in the content of the book but in the application of the concepts presented. Why, because leadership is not a “one size fits all” type of activity.

Many leaders of today hear about a great new book or theory and decide that is the concept they must embrace in their organization. That said, somewhere along the way, generally in the next three or four months, another great book will be discovered. Suddenly a new inspiration appears and must be followed. These people still “go by the book”, but the book changes again and again before any traction can be gained.

Think back over your recent past as a leader, how many different leadership books have you read? How many seemed like the panacea to your problem of sustained success? How many have you acted upon?

The solution is not to avoid these meaningful pieces of knowledge and experience but to determine your course based on your own personal vision and values. Develop a solid three to five year strategic plan and you can afford to tack to the left or right a bit over the years and yet still stay on course.

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