

LEADERSHIP: WE MUST SET BOUNDARIES

By Gary L. Richardson, noted trial lawyer and author of *Black Robe Fever*, *Fear Is Never Our Friend*, and *Thank God They Ate The Apple*.
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Some of you will surely think, "Oh no, not another article on leadership." If so, I understand why that is the case since so many books and articles have been written about leadership, what it entails and "how it should be."

Having been in the leadership role since early in my own career, I too have read many books and articles on the subject of leadership and have to admit that from time to time I still pick up a real "nugget" that adds to my understanding. Hopefully you will find that to be the case here.

The point emphasized in this article is the importance of setting "boundaries" for the people under our leadership.

I believe setting boundaries is just as important as the items so often mentioned for a good leader to implement – items such as ensuring that those being led feel they are a part of the overall objectives; awarding those being led; acknowledging the importance of what those being led are contributing on an individual basis; and helping them to feel significant.

Webster's Dictionary says that leadership is directing and guiding. Fairly simple, wouldn't you agree? But, who says someone wants to be led? So, the challenge obviously becomes how one accomplishes the task/challenge of getting those one is endeavoring to lead, to follow.

We have all seen those in leadership positions that are highly intelligent and highly skilled, yet they fail in their efforts to get those they are trying to lead, to follow. On the other hand, we have seen those of average intelligence and average skills succeed in positions of leadership. I won't go into the difference between what we commonly refer to as "people persons" versus "technicians," other than to say that it takes a combination of both types in order to be a good leader.

We have all also read articles on leadership that talk about the importance of Emotion Quotient (EQ) versus Intelligence Quotient (IQ) when looking for

good leaders. This again is a great area to explore as to why both have importance when thinking of great leaders.

I recently read an article on leadership that had some very good points, yet the writer concluded that there were five ingredients to quality leadership and none was more important than the others. Even though I agree with the author that all are important, I do believe, however, that without a leader setting clear and fair boundaries that are well defined and that the ones being led clearly understand, that without this ingredient, quality leadership will not be accomplished. I see it much like building a cake. Even though I have never built a cake I understand that without dough one cannot build a cake. In other words, as important as all the other ingredients are, without dough, there will not be a cake.

I say the same is the case when it comes to leadership. Without these boundaries I am talking about, there will not be quality leadership. It's also important for the leader to recognize that boundaries often are developed during the leadership role. And, that a particular boundary for one of those being led may not be necessary for another. Again, a boundary must be fair and those being led must understand the importance of the boundary in order for it to be an element of quality leadership.

At the age of 28, and without having ever been placed in a leadership role, after a number of interviews by a national insurance company, I was hired to become the sales manager of a newly to be developed office in Houston, Texas. Additionally, I was hired even though I would become the youngest sales manager with a nationwide company that had offices in all 50 states.

This might explain why I had 8-10 interviews with the regional manager from Denver, Colorado before the decision was finally made to hire me out of a pool of approximately 30 individuals that were being interviewed for the job. I was coming straight out of sales with another company to become a sales manager, without any experience or training.

I hired as my assistant and office manager a lady who was in her mid-50s. Myrtle fit right in and didn't allow the age difference to become an obstacle in following my leadership. Myrtle served as my loyal assistant/office manager until I made a career change some six years later. During those six years Myrtle and I only had one issue. By the time we had this issue, I had opened five other satellite offices and was managing an average of 15-20 sales people.

This is what happened. I made the decision to start looking for office space for our main office (where Myrtle and I officed) that would be closer to my home. A few days later one of the sales persons told me that Myrtle had commented that she didn't think moving the office was a good thing. I called Myrtle in and "set a boundary."

I first asked Myrtle what I had done to cause her to believe that I had extended her responsibility beyond what it had been for the past four years. She looked confused. I said that I knew that I had done something because I was confident that either she didn't do what I had been told she had done or else she had gone beyond her area of responsibility. Again, she was confused. I then asked Myrtle if she had said what I had been told she had said. She bowed her head and confirmed that she had. I next expressed my appreciation for her and how well she had done the job she had been hired to do during the last four years and then pointed out that by making such a statement, she had moved into my area of responsibility, something that she knew that I would not allow. Myrtle was very apologetic and I once again reassured her of my appreciation for her and the job she was doing and looked forward to a long time together. She never stepped over a boundary again. I often think of the scripture that says that it is the little foxes that spoil the vein. I look upon things of this nature as "little foxes," and to allow them to occur and not be dealt with I am of the firm conviction that the "vein" will ultimately be spoiled. I fault the leader for not setting a boundary when this happens, not the one being led.

On another occasion I visited one of my satellite offices, which I did periodically, and noticed that Judy, the lady at the front desk, was reading a novel. I had other reasons for believing that she had gotten into a habit of similar activity during working hours. So, I called Judy in and first asked how she was enjoying her position with the company, to which she expressed great pride in her job and talked about how much she appreciated it. I then said, "Judy, if you listen very carefully, I will tell you how you can keep your job." I set a boundary!!!!!! I explained that I was sure that she was being paid for eight hours of her time each day and that when she was doing personal things at the front desk such as personal phone calls, reading a novel and the like, that we were not getting what we had expected when we hired her and what we were paying her for. In other words, her future was within her own control to keep this job that she had just expressed that she liked so much. The boundary was fair, it was clear, she understood it and

understood the reason for it and that was the last challenge we had with Judy. I never ever felt that this had created any kind of tension or challenges between Judy and myself.

My present assistant/office manager has been with me for 24 years. She knows what I expect of her and it is such that she is agreeable to our arrangement. During these 24 years I have had only one challenge with Christina. If you ask her I am confident she would tell you that she knows me very well, considers me to be fair, yet firm, and would tell you that she full well knows what the boundaries/expectations of her are.

I personally have found over the years that some who are in a leadership position find it difficult to set boundaries and simply let things go until the "vein" has been eaten away and the leader ends up terminating what in many instances could have been a great team player, or else the team player resigns out of frustration. I personally do not believe this is fair to the one being led. It's often confusing when terminated in this scenario since the expectations never had been communicated and boundaries set.

Leadership roles can be a lot of fun, but certain principles of leadership must be adhered to in order to be successful.

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