

LEADERSHIP IS MORE THAN TALKING BY KENNETH "BUZZ" A. SHAW

## GET REAL



**S**ure, leaders must be able to think and speak well. And they must motivate and inspire. But the real task is, as author Ronald Heifetz puts it, "Getting people to address real problems in a real way."

What does that mean? It means that effective leaders help to clarify what matters most; they identify important issues, help others to truly understand them and deal with the inevitable trade-offs required.

And people, employees, loved ones, voters and even teenagers can deal with real prob-

lems in a real way. How can we do this? First, leaders have to do more than sell their ideas. Selling is important, but we aren't credible if we don't also look at various alternatives to our pet solution and openly discuss the trade-offs. This is why some communications experts advise the idea seller to first talk about the proposal's downside. Openness makes for credibility; it also makes good tactical sense.

Second, we should allow a full discussion of the pros and cons of an idea or initiative before getting to the selling stage. Trying to "sell" your teenage son on why he doesn't need his own car is less effective than showing him the cost of insurance, maintenance and gasoline and inviting him to participate in how this challenge can be solved.

Another example would be a small private college trying to decide how much of a pay increase to give to an underpaid faculty and staff. It isn't that difficult to show the cost of each percent raise, ways to obtain the money and the costs of doing so. How much would a 1 percent increase equal in a tuition increase, operating cost cutbacks, enrollment increases and so on?

And what is the price paid for each of these methods? Can they be combined in a way to best accomplish the goal of improving salaries? Isn't this method better than demonstrating the need for the increase but with no realistic plan to get it done?

If you are a board member of either a profit or nonprofit organization, you should expect a well articulated position as to why a certain initiative must be taken. Yet, you should also expect to hear of the pros and cons of various alternatives, and most importantly, be told what could go wrong.

My wish is that before any presidential election campaigning is over we see one or more of the candidates deal with "real problems in a real way." Voters aren't children. I

didn't vote for Ross Perot in 1992. But those that can remember that far back know that he did garner 18.9 percent of the presidential vote running as an independent. Perot ran on a platform of balancing the national budget. He would get his flip charts out (no PowerPoint then) and show how this would be accomplished. He offered his thoughts in a way that promoted discussion of not only his ideas but of alternatives. He did our country a great service; not through polemics but helping voters better understand the issues.

Maybe I am too idealistic in hoping that one or more of the candidates will help us work through today's issues — especially in today's rapid communications "gotcha games" rule. If so, let us still expect that who we elect as our leader takes hold of the issues that must be confronted and invites us to be a part of the solution.

In the meantime, there is nothing to stop us from providing true leadership where we live, dealing with "real problems in a real way." This is what true leaders do. **S**

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