

Leadership Toolbox - Have One!

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When I moved out of my parents' home long (long) ago, I remember a conversation with my Dad about my toolbox. Of course, he was referring to the toolbox to fix things like loose screws, squeaky door hinges, broken just about anything, etc. I remember thinking at 19, yea, sure Dad. If anything breaks, I'm calling you and many times I did in those early years.

Recently, I was organizing and cleaning out my fancy toolbox to ensure I had the various things in there together as the just in case thing. Technically this occurred after a power outage and my meltdown trying to find a flashlight, but that's for another day and another story.

As I was organizing and inventorying my items such as duct tape, Gorilla Glue, WD40, hammer, drill, and that amazing flashlight to make sure I was covered, I started thinking about how this toolbox relates to my leadership style too. An odd combo, but the more I started pulling out the various items I could relate them to my leadership toolbox that I use everyday to navigate my office, professional positions, volunteer roles, etc.

Duct tape

A paper rips, tape it. A birthday sign needs hung, tape it. A project is tearing apart, tape it. A gift needs wrapped, tape it. Tapes fixes problems. Be a leader who is like tape, fix problems. Collaborate to find solutions. Set the expectation with your teammates that if they come to you with problems, they know you will hear them and collaborate with them to find solutions and find the tape together.

According to www.medium.com,

The reality is that there will always be a long list of problems to solve but as a leader, you really want to be shining a light on as many of them as possible. As such building an environment where people feel safe to surface problems early and often is paramount. Only through identifying them can you start to solve them. The best way you can do this as a leader is to simply be welcoming and empathetic.

Gorilla Glue

Be the glue that holds the team together through good or bad.

According to www.leadershipcall.com,

To be the “glue” in a company means to be someone that is trustworthy, respected and unites people with a focus towards a common goal. It means someone who successfully bonds two different pieces or several sides of an organization together to function as one unit, even when it’s not their role. They naturally inspire the team to “stick together” when challenges are present. This powerful and persuasive team member/leader demonstrates perseverance and integrity.

Strife will rear its ugly head from time to time on a team, but a true leader needs to work to unite the team and keep them focused. A leader has the people’s trust and respect and the team will turn to that leader when needed so be that leader!

WD-40

“The squeaky wheel gets the oil.” I come from a family of one liners from my Grandma to my Dad. When I was younger, my Grandma would say this at what I thought was odd times. As I have gotten older, I’ve realized more of what she meant and why.

According to Merriam-Webster, the saying is “used to say that someone who complains or causes problems is more likely to receive attention or help than someone who stays quiet and does not cause problems.” Many times, Grandma was referring to the complaining we may have done as children about this thing or another ... or each other. You pick.

So as a leader, you must have your WD-40 on hand to deal with complaints, problems, and/or loud people or situations. So, your WD-40 is your education and training in emotional intelligence. It’s figuring out the personalities and issues involved and then responding and helping accordingly.

But what is emotional intelligence you ask?

According to www.verywellmind.com,

Emotional intelligence (EI) refers to the ability to perceive, control, and evaluate emotions. Some researchers suggest that emotional intelligence can be learned and strengthened, while others claim it’s an inborn characteristic.

The ability to express and control emotions is essential, but so is the ability to understand, interpret, and respond to the emotions of others. Imagine a world in which you could not understand when a friend was feeling sad or when a co-worker was angry. Psychologists refer to this ability as emotional intelligence, and some experts even suggest that it can be more important than IQ in your overall success in life.

Hammer

Be the hammer for your team. Be relentless when you need to. Stand up for your team and be their leader. Be their voice. I see the hammer as the leader in my toolbox. The power and strength it brings to a situation. I see my presence and demeanor has my hammer strength because I believe in standing up for my team as I have no fear in doing so in a respectful and heard manner, being their voice to others to ensure they are heard and being their true leader.

According to www.mindtools.com,

When you stand up for people, you show that you're "on their side" when they need help. This builds long-term loyalty, trust, credibility, commitment, and morale in your team, and it gives your people a confidence boost. It also shows that you are focused on your team's well-being and interests, rather than on yourself. This helps to create a positive working environment and shows everyone that you're a leader worth following.

Drill

I look at the drill as my mechanism to guide, communicate, and coach the ideas and concepts of teamwork, common goals, and even specific work projects with my team. I am a leader who needs my team. I cannot do it alone so I need to give my team the tools and capabilities to go forth and conquer what's at hand whether it's handling a tough work project or handling a tough work relationship issue. My coaching through clear communication and understanding empowers them with the knowledge and information they need to handle it.

Like a drill that can go from small simple delicate jobs to grinding through metal, a leader must be able to navigate many projects, ideas, and concepts at any given moment too. Communicating and coaching the team helps everyone achieve success. A leader must work to carve out (or drill out) more leaders!

Flashlight

Shine light on your teammates accomplishments as this will in turn cause them to accomplish even more. Recognition is a huge component to a solid leadership style. Your teammates will flourish knowing you stand by them, give them the proper shoutouts, and in general support them.

From my article titled "Power of Recognition" published by PACO in Fall 2021,

"It's the little things" ... so short, sweet, and to the point and yet so very true. Something so simple can move the needle so much for someone and it does not take a full-blown, over-the-top recognition program to do the trick. It starts with "thank you" and increases from there. People will repeat rewarded behaviors so therefore the power of recognition is a ripple effect that you can watch blossom into loyalty, engagement, and passion.

For many, knowing the various types of recognition is where one needs to start. These options go from free to rather inexpensive especially in the big picture of why recognition is so powerful and a great tool to use with your team.

By taking the time to recognize a team member for a positive situation, behavior, and/or result, you, as the people leader, are further reinforcing that behavior or result and others on the team will see that and hopefully also take note. As a direct reinforcer, the recognition can't be superficial. It must be honest and deserved. I tend in this area to lead with my heart because that is where I believe my true genuineness comes from and I believe my team can see that and knows it.

Resources:

- Dad
- Grandma
- Life
- Chelsea
- <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/a%2Fthe%20squeaky%20wheel%20gets%20the%20grease%2Foil>
- <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-emotional-intelligence-2795423>
- <https://medium.com/swlh/great-leaders-think-bring-problems-lets-find-a-solution-together-5660d342cdec>
- <https://leadershipcall.com/index.php/2019/12/13/who-is-the-glue-in-your-company/#:~:text=To%20be%20the%20%E2%80%9Cglue%E2%80%9D%20in,when%20it's%20not%20their%20role.>
- <https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/standing-up-for-your-people.htm#:~:text=When%20you%20stand%20up%20for,your%20people%20a%20confidence%20boost.>
- PACO Member Publications (www.pacoparalegals.org)