



In a Leader's Absence...

By Chanon Collins

In most small businesses, there is one individual who is responsible for the entire organization. This is not to say that he or she completes every task, but the success or failure of the company rests on his or her shoulders. What happens to a company when something happens to the leader? If you were called away for a lengthy period of time, due to a family crisis, health reasons, or civic duty, how would your company fare? If an "Out of Business" sign flashed in your mind, you should take a few simple steps to ensure the continued success of your company.

The first place you will turn in your absence is to your team. If you have hired wisely, you will have nothing to fear. On the other hand, if you hired simply to fill a void for a moment and the moment has passed without replacement, your company is headed for a disaster. When you hire, look for intelligence, initiative, and integrity. Experience is also a plus, but intelligent people can learn the tools or skills of your company quickly, so don't let lack of experience keep you from hiring a potential star. As you build your team, allow the team to shine and not your ego. These are the people who will be maintaining your day-to-day activities to push your business forward. Give them credit for their hard work.

Once you have hired a strong team, remember to reward them well. Rewards do not always need to be financial. Public acknowledgment of a job well-done is a sure way to create loyalty among team members. You should also be an integral part of your team. This does not mean that you should micro-manage your employees, but you should be aware of each of the tasks of your team members. Remember the phrase, "when the cat's away, the mice will play"? Well, if you don't know what the mice are supposed to be doing, it will be extremely difficult to check on their progress.

If you have established solid lines of communication with your team members, you should have very few worries during your time away. Your employees are always just a phone call away and daily or weekly communications will keep you abreast of the activities of your employees and your company. Encourage your employees to communicate with you during your absence. If you are absent due to health reasons, you will want to develop a system for communication so that your recovery is not hindered.

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As difficult as it might be to believe, you are not completely indispensable. Of course, there will be things that no one else can do as well as you, but these things can still be accomplished on a lesser level. Every great leader has a second in command. Select someone from your company who shares your goals and aspirations and allow her or him to act for you in your absence. You must make it clear to all the team members that this person has your confidence and authority to make decisions until your return. The open communication with all team members will ensure a system of checks and balances for everyone in your company. Remember that your absence is not permanent and “every great man is always being helped by everybody; for his gift is to get good out of all things and persons.” – John Ruskin

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