

Leadership Responsiveness



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Everyone has an idea of what leadership responsiveness is all about. Responsiveness usually means reaction to changing market conditions, competitive threats or opportunities. But that's not what I mean in this article. I mean responsiveness to people. Responsiveness to people and to their ideas. Being able to harness that incredible brain power that exists both in and outside of companies.

Most executives claim to have an open door policy. Possibly, if you can get past the security guards onto the executive floor or the executive row and then past the ever vigilant gatekeeper, the administrative assistant and then find the executive not in a meeting or on the phone or even bent over the computer. The door itself may be open but the message is clear. "Not Open!"

My company does business acceleration consulting and our success is based on first hand experience at the CEO/President/General Manager level with Fortune top 10 companies down through start ups. I am amazed at how many leaders are actually becoming more and more closed off to new ideas. They just don't seem to care and they are unaware of what they are doing.

It's understandable that leaders can't reply to every message, e-mail, phone call or employee note or even being available to their own employees. Leaders are busy people. They are out there leading. However, I have encountered far too many instances where leaders are insulated and miss significant opportunities to learn and grow both themselves and their business.

I'll bet most of you have experienced the "really not open" open door policy described above. Let me give you a couple of examples involving external shut off.

I have been part of an executive forum group, three actually. Following a presentation created specifically for these groups, I sent personalized e-mail follow ups to each of the CEOs/Presidents with specific reference to their particular issues and opportunities that had surfaced during our discussions. I received 2 responses out of 14 and the two were from executives from the same company. A month passed and I send another personalized e-mail to all 14 again with specifics for them and this time with business acceleration article I had written for CEOs. 2 responses. One from one of the first responders and a new one. 2 out of 14 twice!

A CEO of a small company asked me for some of my materials for his use. I sent it to him later that afternoon. Response? No. Response to a follow up asking if I could help him use the materials? No! Full benefit to him and his company? No!!!

An associate, Cathy Hammer (www.cathyhammer.com) and I have contacted several executives of a rapidly growing company multiple times by mail, email and phone. We had some personal experience in their industry and some ideas as to how to accelerate their business. Response? No. We did get a garbled answering machine message. Thankfully we know about the beep.

On the other hand, I commented on an article on the blog of Lewis Green, Bizsolutions (lgbusinesssolutions.typepad.com/solutions_to_grow_your_bu). To my surprise, I received a thank you note from him. I'll comment again and share ideas.

This all could be construed as business etiquette and it is. But it is also a lack of openness to the awareness of new ideas and leadership unresponsiveness. It would be easy to say that this is just me. Many others are writing and commenting on this phenomenon.

Let me ask you who do you think is going to get the new ideas? Which companies are actually going to benefit from the ideas? Which executives are going to get the personal growth opportunities? Some are eventually going to get the ideas but they will pay a much higher price.

So if you are a leader or hope to be one some day, start being responsive to people. Have an actual open door policy for at least some time every week and make it known. Respond to e-mails, phone messages etc. in some way so that you stop being rude and you may actually get some ideas. Leaders interact with the people. It is only through the people that you are going to be effective in responding to new market conditions, competitive threats, opportunities. Give me a call or drop me a note if you see the benefit in this idea.