

Column: IBD's 10 Secrets To Success

Be Honest and Dependable; Take Responsibility

Consume Accountability

By Steve Watkins

Top leadership starts with accountability and carries through to honesty. Ways to wear those traits:

- **Uphold your values.** "If you don't have a principled leader, the other stuff doesn't matter," said Frances Hesselbein, founding president of the New York-based Leader to Leader Institute, which aims to build leadership in the social sector. "In the end, the quality and character of a leader determines results."
- **Be consistent.** You can't pick your spots. "There's no such thing as, 'I'll be slightly dishonest today,'" said Hesselbein, co-editor of the new book "The Organization of the Future 2." "Once you go against your values, it's harder to go back to the principles you've set. "And it becomes easier to break them again."
- **Focus on results.** That's the best way to hold people accountable, says Blythe McGarvie, chief executive of Williamsburg, Va.-based global growth consultant LIF Group. Reward people when their work proves successful, but don't if they miss their goals. "I don't believe in rewarding for effort," she said.
- **Make it clear.** Enunciate your values, post them on a plaque or publish them in an annual report. That keeps everyone on the same page, Hesselbein says.
- **Set an example.** People watch how the leader acts more than what the leader says. "Leadership is a matter of how to be, not how to do," said Hesselbein. "When they see you live and believe what you say, morale goes up, trust is high and productivity soars."
- **Take action.** McGarvie serves on the board of insurer Travelers. That firm boosted its 401(k) match to employees this year, knowing they're worried about retirement savings. "That's real accountability, and it's well-received," said McGarvie, author of "Shaking the Globe."
- **Stay visible.** Another company recently had to institute layoffs. McGarvie—a board member there—made sure she was in the company's office when the layoffs took place, showing management was accountable for the decision. "People appreciated that," she said. "That's managing by walking around."
- **Go with substance.** Canceling trips awarded to successful employees doesn't make a firm accountable, McGarvie says. "That's often just for show, and it's demoralizing to employees," she said.
- **Stay focused.** Set goals that stay true to your mission, Hesselbein says. Leaders run into problems when their goals stray. They compromise their principles.
- **Make workers feel vital.** Thomas Moran, CEO of Mutual of America Life Insurance, shows employees how much they are valued. That's done through training and by providing support for volunteering and philanthropy. "The successful organization of the future will have to be able not only to attract and retain talented employees, but also to inspire those employees," Moran wrote in "The Organization of the Future 2."
- **Take charge of details.** Some executives have said they didn't know the details of their firm's financial statements. It doesn't take long to get a grasp of the numbers. It's a red flag if you can't understand them, they're not reasonable or the assumptions don't make sense, says McGarvie.