

Recently I had the pleasure of having dinner with Frank Sinatra, Jr. He was here in Chicago for a benefit concert for Roosevelt University (my wife is chairperson of the benefit). Our conversation ranged over a wide variety of subjects, including a small gem of an HBO television movie, "Truman" with Gary Sinise in the title role.

Sinatra expressed admiration for Truman's no-nonsense approach to leadership. From there our conversation moved on to the subject of leadership in general, and, while Sinatra dismissed his own conclusions with a modest, "What do I know? I'm just a thick-skulled musician," much of what he said struck a chord with me.

The leadership qualities he admired (and ones I admire as well) were simple: Truman's understanding of accountability—"The buck stops here"—and Ronald Reagan's clarity of vision. You may not have agreed with many of Reagan's policies, but you at least knew what they were.

These simple elements of leadership are often overlooked; or, what strikes me as a little sad and funny at the same time, about once every four or five years, some management "expert" dusts them off and brings them out as the latest insight that's going to save American competitiveness and turn your company into the next Microsoft and you into the next Bill Gates. Then he charges \$49.95 a pop for a 300-page book explaining it all.

The fact is these basic leadership rules are so simple that anyone can understand them, and without 300 pages of explanation. No Harvard MBA or University of Chicago doctorate in economics is required.

Rule One is this: Have a clear understanding of where you want to go and how you intend to get there. Your basic goal should be so simple that it can be expressed in one or two sentences a grade school child can understand; for example, "to make a profit selling gears." Here at the magazine our goal is this: To be the *Gear Industry's Information Source*.

Getting your goal down to a couple of simple sentences requires some hard

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thinking and clearing away of all the clutter and buzzwords that can muddy the water. But unless your goal is clear, at least in your mind, all your other efforts may be wasted.

It's not enough to know where you're going. You have to tell your destination to the people you expect to follow you, such as your employees. This is the area in which Ronald Reagan shined. He told people where he was going and invited them along.

The days of managing by means of the mantra, "Trust me, I know what I'm doing," are over in business, if not in politics. The bright, hard-working, innovative employees we all want don't work well for managers who tell them that, and expecting them to do so is a waste of the valuable resource they represent. Outside the earshot of managers, employees call the trust-me approach the "mushroom school of management," (keep people in the dark and cover them with "fertilizer"), and they respond to such treatment with the contempt it deserves.

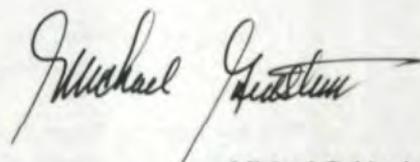
Rule Two in our Dinner-Table Course in Basic Management is the Harry Truman Rule: "The buck stops here." Somebody has to have the final responsibility for each piece of the project and for the overall project. That person has to be clearly identifiable to everyone involved. Correlatively, if a particular someone is accountable for the success or failure of the project, he or she has to be empowered to get the job done. You can't make people responsible for a job and then not give them the tools or the freedom to do it.

Neither of these rules is a piece of complicated, mystic wisdom. A bunch of reasonably intelligent people from a variety of backgrounds came up with them in the course of a dinner-table conversation. And yet, there are dozens, if not hundreds, of companies (not to men-

tion our various government bodies) out there whose management teams don't seem to "get it." Cartoonist Scott Adams' Dilbert has become a new workplace hero, and Adams has become a millionaire by poking fun at them.

A recent issue of *Forbes* ran a feature about Bridgestone Tire's President Yoichiro Kaizaki. He came to Akron, OH, and turned around a company that had been hemorrhaging red ink with a basic strategy. His mission statement: Let's make a profit selling tires. His implementation: Remind each one of the division presidents of Harry Truman's dictum, "The buck stops here," by the simple expedient of linking their pay to their performance.

The implementation was not without pain, but Kaizaki kept his eye on his simple goal and on the Harry Truman Rule, and the company has begun its turnaround. It's a strategy that will work with any business, even making gears.



Michael Goldstein
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