Meghan Cappel

Mr. Bill Bagley

Character-Based Leadership

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Strategic Partners

In his foreword to Robert Greenleaf’s novel *Insights on Leadership*, Steven Covey wrote, “Leaders are learning that this kind of empowerment, which is what Servant Leadership represents, is one of the key principles that, based on practice, not talk, will be the deciding point between an organization’s enduring success or its eventual extinction.” As the future business leaders of the Cincinnati area, we, as Carl H. Lindner Honors-PLUS students, need to continue to develop and foster the necessary skills of a successful servant leader in order to become strategic partners in our respective firms. The term servant-leadership clearly defines that we must first be servants, consumed with a fiery passion towards helping others, before we can become leaders. Greenleaf stresses the importance of serving others’ highest needs above our own. The strategic partner leadership model is important because it shifts the focus from the individual to the needs of others. Strategic partners can talk the talk and walk the walk. Every firm desires strategic partners because they can have a creative vision that can completely change the firm and direct the company towards the path to success. Strategic partners can serve their colleagues, mentors, and protégés in a multitude of ways. For example, strategic partners could bring subordinates and interns to client meetings, helping to make introductions while allowing these people to feel that their work is critical in the firm’s success. Peers and subordinates need to be inspired to rise above the expectation to be championed and receive recognition and promotion. Most importantly, strategic partners are role models for all people in their work and social environments. The strategic partner is a beacon for those striving to emulate their behaviors. Becoming a strategic partner requires differentiating ourselves from the pack and being a servant leader will allow this to happen.

Successful strategic partners have the six core competencies engrained in their being. First, personal credibility is extremely important as strategic partners serve as role models for others. The strategic partner needs to display professionalism, integrity, and a positive self-image. Next, strategic leaders have a keen sense of the current events taking place around them and can participate in discussions with clients, co-workers, and subordinates. Strategic partners also need to be able to communicate clearly and express personal views in a persuasive manner to continue developing professional success in others. Whether it is oral or written communication, the message needs to be short, sweet, and to the point. Adjusting to the audience is also a key skill for strategic leaders, as they are dealing with people inside and outside the organization, executives, junior professionals, and interns. Another core competency strategic partners must possess is the ability to successfully manage themselves around the time they are given. Strategic leaders know they need to focus their energy in quadrant two, with personal and professional development. They focus on the re-creation, spending 60%-80% of their time doing important, but not urgent tasks. It’s easy to waste time, but strategic partners know that the time they are wasting is their own. Strategic partners live by the compass, using their vision, values, mission, and conscience to provide direction on how to live. Today, many business professionals do not know the vision or mission of their companies, but a strategic partner is fully aware. In contrast, strategic partners live for the mission and vision, and have a clear understanding of both. Business knowledge, creativity, and consultative skills are important for strategic partners because closing the deal takes time and effort and makes a business successful. Marketplace eminence is another competency that strategic leaders possess and Mr. Steve McKinley emphasized its importance when he spoke to our class. In business, networking is the key to success. It’s all about who you know, and who knows you. Being a strategic partner means always striving to build our own network, while increasing connections and association for subordinates and peers through introductions. The final skill a strategic leader must possess is the ability to lead others towards success. A strategic partner leads and mentors others in the firm to create a succession plan of future strategic leaders. Junior professionals need to be inspired and mentored by senior professionals to strive for achievement.

Successful firms have four primary organizational goals that focus on different facets of the firm. First and foremost, growth of the practice is central to the leadership focus. Without strong leaders, the firm has no clear vision. Without a clear vision, employees are unsure of what their ultimate goal is and are uncertain how to attain it. Next, Human Resources management focuses on recruiting, developing, and retaining top talent. HR is crucial because it’s the people that bring the money to the firm. Companies can only be as flourishing as their talent, and leaders need to be recruited to promote the firm to clients. Another facet is cultivating professional and personal development of each individual which is the central focus of mentors. In a job interview, we should always ask about the mentoring program, especially as interns and co-ops to ensure we are exploring our career options. Finally, enhancing individual value and personal marketability is central to the focus of the individual. If each individual feels she is learning and developing with the firm, her skill set increases. Additionally, this employee will be content with her work at the firm and won’t be searching for a new position. If all four of these goals are met, an organization will be functioning at high efficiency, turnover will be low, and profits will be substantial.

In order to fully be a strategic partner in a firm, we must fulfill all of our needs. Abraham Maslow developed the Hierarchy of Needs model in the 1940s and 1950s. On the bottom of the pyramid are our most basic needs – air, food, water, etc. As we move up the pyramid, our needs become more advanced. Safety, family, affection, achievement, and reputation all need to be achieved before we can reach our final need of self-actualization. When we achieve self-actualization, we have reached our personal growth and fulfillment. According to Abraham Maslow, only about 1% of each generation experiences self-actualization regardless of class or economic status. Most people stop before they ever reach the top of the pyramid because they are willing to accept their status in life. Some people do not know how to self-actualize. Self-actualizing people are comfortable with themselves. They are non-conformists who are creative and have a wide global view of current issues. Strategic partners have reached self-actualization, but they continue to further enhance themselves through learning and relationship building. Reaching self-actualization also contributes to personal marketability, as the person is continually striving for additional challenges, new experiences, and continuous personal improvement. Successful strategic partners encourage the self-actualization of their employees because, as people grow, they are more productive and content in their work-life.

Dr. Edward Banfield was an accomplished author and a controversial expert on urban affairs. He developed the career destination model after proving his first model incorrect. In his first model, Dr. Banfield felt that individuals who were successful in life were genetically predisposed towards success or were born into a successful family. He conducted many interviews and did years of research to find that this original theory was incorrect. Instead, he found that the individuals who focused on moving forward towards fulfilling personal goals were more successful in life. He determined that the individual needs to rise each day with a goal-seeking mentality to stay motivated. As students and business professionals, we need to establish a goal for where we want to be to set a vision for ourselves. In everything we undertake, this goal needs to be emblazoned in our minds so that we think about how each decision we make might affect our end goal. Every day, we need to find something that will move us closer to achieving our end goal, whether it’s making a new connection or reading a chapter of a leadership novel. While we may need to adjust our sails, we should never take our eyes off our end goal. Strategic partners are able to reach their end goal by conquering small goals every day. We can become strategic partners by asking ourselves daily, “Is what I am doing currently going to help me on my path towards becoming a strategic partner?’ If the answer is no, it’s time to make a change.