

Leadership in the Food and Beverage Environment and Beyond!

BY MICHAEL HOLTZMAN

Harry S. Truman once remarked that, "Leadership is the ability to get men to do what they don't want to do and like it." Just what is it that makes people do what they don't necessarily want to do, and above all, like it? What leadership skills are necessary to achieve such an ambitious goal? This article will attempt to explore these questions as they relate to the club food and beverage industry, however, bear in mind that leadership skills transcend the hospitality community and are the basis of most successful organizations.



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Effective leadership has many forms and uses many tools that are customized for the situation at hand.

In examining leadership, we must recognize that there are several types, two of which are earned and acquired leadership.

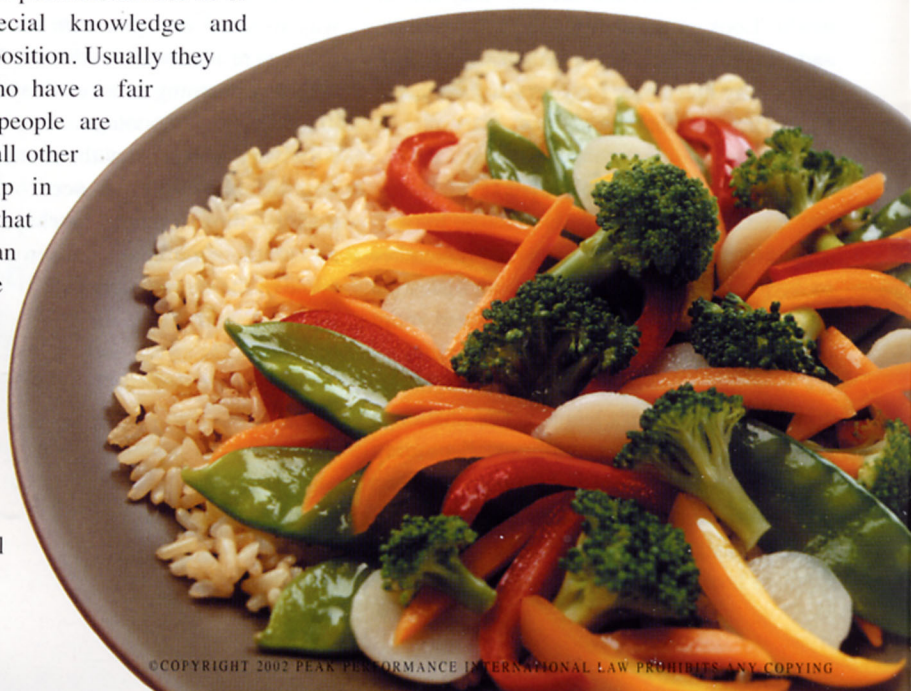
EARNED LEADERSHIP

Someone who has earned leadership may possess special knowledge. For example, the server who is responsible for training has this position because he or she has demonstrated special knowledge and professionalism toward their position. Usually they are members of the staff who have a fair amount of seniority. These people are typically the employees that all other employees look to for help in solving problems. We can say that this type of employee has an informal-legitimate influence on the rest of the staff. Informal because they may not been given an official title, legitimate because their knowledge is real and valuable. This type of employee doesn't show up on your traditional organizational chart.

ACQUIRED LEADERSHIP

A second type of leadership is acquired leadership. Acquired leadership is usually bestowed by a higher authority, typically the manager of the establishment who was hired by the owner or owner's representative to run the facility. This is not to say that this person's position is not earned, nor is it to say that they are not deserving of it. It is, however, a position of formal-legitimate influence, whereby a formal title is given and certain power is granted. It is this second type of leadership we will focus on as we discuss the skills necessary to be an effective leader in today's club food and beverage environment.

Now that you have an idea of some of the types of leadership, it's time to examine the requirements and qualities needed to operate a successful club food and beverage facility. Leadership is an aggregate of a person's management or people skills. How a person acts in a given situation is often dictated by the circumstances of the moment. Management skills can be compared to a carpenter's toolbox where there is almost assuredly a tool for every occasion.





DEALING WITH DIVERSITY

To show leadership in a food and beverage environment, the successful leader must possess a metaphorical toolbox of assorted skills, ready to use at a moment's notice. The typical food and beverage leader has to deal with diversity on a daily basis. The work force at many establishments can resemble the United Nations, literally a blend of cultures and customs from around the world. Today's effective leader must recognize this and examine ways to work with these challenges. To coin a phrase, "This isn't your father's management style anymore," today's leader must adapt—or face extinction. In effect, they must add more tools to their toolbox.

BE A TEACHER

A favorite analogy of a food and beverage leader is that of a schoolteacher. Over the years, employees come and go but the manager remains, ready to teach the next groups of employees, not unlike a schoolteacher. It is therefore easy to see that to be an effective leader you must be an effective teacher, who the "students" feel comfortable coming to for direction and guidance. This is not to say that the effective leader must possess maternalistic qualities, but the relationship should be forged out of mutual respect for each person's role in the organization.

CAN A LEADER BE A FRIEND?

Being liked versus respected is a complex issue that most leaders face. Is it important that the leader be well liked? Does being well liked diminish his or her credibility or authority? How close can the leader be with his or her crew? Can a leader be a friend? If so, can they maintain their objectivity and push their "friends" to work harder? If, on the other hand, the leader is distant and aloof, will the crew put forth their best effort? Will they have a sense of loyalty to the leader?

For some people and situations, the task of getting the job done is paramount to the social need to be liked, while for others, the opposite might hold true. Why, then, is it difficult to mix these traits? One reason may be that many people are rarely good at both. They have skills that best lend themselves to one over the other. How open, honest and objective can a leader be if they have emotional ties to an employee or group of employees? On the other hand, all work and no play make Jack or Jane a dull person.

EMPOWERING THE STAFF

The sign of a good leader is not how well the staff works when they are there, rather the true indication of an effective leader is how well the staff works when the leader is not there! An effective leader will empower his or her staff to handle situations as they arise, not necessarily in the exact manner as the absent

leader, but in a way consistent with the culture of the food service organization. This type of atmosphere only exists where the leader fosters independent thinking. Allowing for, and learning from, mistakes, is most often the best way to cultivate a staff that can think for themselves. The "micro-manager," on the other hand, feels it necessary to be involved in every detail of the operation. Delegation does not come easy to a micro-manager. Often times, this type of leadership style stunts the growth of the staff and forces them to become dependent on the manager for the most trivial of needs.

People are not born with leadership qualities, rather they are acquired through his or her life experiences, trial and error and working under the tutelage of good mentors. To measure your success as a leader, one need only ask themselves how many subordinates have they inspired to make a career in the food service industry. The greatest accomplishment any one can achieve is knowing that they have had a positive influence on an employee's life.

We have touched on just a few of the issues affecting leadership qualities. It is assumed that each manager has his or her own preferred leadership style, which they will opt for whenever possible. However, use of the preferred style should be tempered by what is the best outcome for the organization in any particular situation. Remember that effective leadership has many forms and uses many tools that are customized for the situation at hand. Knowing which tool to use in a given situation will go a long way toward developing effective leadership skills. ■

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