

The 21st Century Manager: Getting it All Done

Think for a moment about why you entered your chosen field.

Are you actually doing the job you thought you'd be doing, or have dozens of peripheral duties been turfed your way? As budgets become leaner, many managers admit to an increasing amount of job dissatisfaction as the gap between their actual job responsibilities and their original career goals grows ever wider.

In a climate this busy and frugal, it's easy for managers to get overwhelmed. One solution is to learn how to outsource necessary tasks like training and business communications, leaving you more time to attend to your core business.

This is a strategy I have adopted frequently. With a relatively small staff, strategic partnerships have allowed us to meet our goals quickly and efficiently.

For example, picture the HR manager who has been tasked with developing an employee training program. How can this person maintain the training programs that the company's employees need, deliver them in a way that's fresh and interactive, protect the company's bottom line and preserve her sanity, too?

Many forward-thinking, cost-conscious professionals do it this way: they find creative, affordable partners who can manage their company's training initiatives cost-effectively.

The goal is to find a single partner who can develop, create and deliver programs across as many of the company's training needs as possible-- from technical to interpersonal, from customer service to leadership development. Choosing one partner who can provide broad-spectrum training in supervisory skills, personal development, computer training and job-specific skills will give a company the best return on its investment of time and resources.

Outsourcing can be a great boon to a business or employer, but before you reach out, ask yourself 3 questions:

1. **Does your vision and mission match your potential partner's?**
If this fundamental fit isn't there at the outset, your chances for a successful partnership are slim to none.
2. **How much is it going to cost?**
Tally the start-up costs and ongoing expenses, and make certain the final number justifies your short-term and long-term investment.

3. How much time, energy and resources will this arrangement entail?

The price of the project is only one aspect of its total cost; how much time you will need to invest is just as critical. What kind of equipment—office space, desks, computers, and connectivity—will be required?

Strategic partnerships, when developed thoroughly and carefully, are great investments. The prospective partners who pass your “3 Question Test” will not only save money, they’ll help gain you valuable time to focus on your core business.

Before long, you’ll find that the job you envisioned, and the job you’re actually doing, are closer than ever.

The Extraordinary Leader

I enjoy leadership development books the way some people plow through the Harry Potter series. Wizards, Dementors, and dragons aside, it’s information about how ordinary people go from good to great in the workplace that I find endlessly fascinating.

The book I read most recently on this topic is *The Extraordinary Leader: Going From Good to Great* by a pair of trail-blazing authors in this subject area—Jack Zenger, and Joseph Folkman. Unlike some thinkers who believe extraordinary leaders are born, Zenger and Folkman believe that anyone can learn to be a great leader.

This book builds on a concept introduced by Jim Collins in his classic business development book *From Good to Great*. What Collins identified for organizations and companies Zenger and Folkman approach from an individual level.

Zenger and Folkman agree with the conventional wisdom: when you’re a leader, knowledge is power. Accurate, effective decision-making depends on how much you know—about yourself, your staff, your vendors, your customers and the organization as a whole.

The Extraordinary Leader begins by defining 16 core competencies of high performing leaders. The authors began by collecting quantitative data from a scientific analysis of over 25,000 real leaders. They concluded that leaders who move from “good” to “a little bit better” don’t make much of a difference. It’s not until one becomes a great leader that there will be any significant impact.

What separates Zenger and Folkman’s point of view from others like them is a matter of focus. Rather than working on remediating weaknesses, say the authors, extraordinary leaders focus on building on and leading with their strengths.