

Leadership by the Numbers

by Tim Pearson

What's the leadership number in your world? Hint: it's often connected to wealth creation. The leadership number on King Island in the Bering Strait was 5.5 according to anthropologist Dr. Sergei Bogojavlensky. Building a skinboat (umiak) for hunting required five and 1/2 female walrus skins (male skins are too bumpy). His Harvard dissertation, "Imaangmiut Eskimo Careers: Skinboats in Bering Strait," details how people achieved and maintained power in the old days. If you had a skin boat, you could hunt and support a nine-member crew plus dependents. Leadership brought not just survival, but influence and wealth.

Leadership and leadership development still matter. In October, Chief Executive Magazine and the Center for Creative Leadership published a survey of 750 executives. The findings include the facts that:

--CEOs who said their companies were "financially outperforming their peers" were significantly more likely to say that "their company's culture supports learning and development" and "their leadership development practices are tailored to meet the needs of individual employees."

--78.6% said that the ability to develop leaders is the most important or one of the top 5 factors in achieving competitive advantage.

--However, only 44.2% said they have created and communicated a leadership strategy.

Since 55.8% of Alaskan CEOs may not have created and communicated a leadership strategy, it is worth knowing that numerous Alaskans are active in leadership development. On November 7th, Barbara Brown of Leadership Anchorage hosted an afternoon gathering of people in the field. (Since Anchorage will host the national conference of the Association of Leadership Educators July 16-19, 2003, Barbara thought it made sense for Alaskans to connect before we have guests from out of town.) Barbara talked about the group projects tackled by participants in Leadership Anchorage. Cheryl Westley of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game talked about ADF&G's Friday afternoon brown bag discussion groups. Alice Galvin of BP and Carolyn Rowe of Connections discussed BP's leadership development program – a local initiative that's gone global. Gwen Kennedy of Kennedy & Associates spoke of her experience in helping to bring author and speaker Margaret Wheatley to Alaska. Karla Jutzi of The Growth Company spoke of their partnership with Training Without Walls -- BBNC and Choggiung's management development program.

I'm personally involved with the two current initiatives of Training Without Walls and YKHC's Leadership Development Program.

Training Without Walls (TWOW), sponsored since 1995 by Bristol Bay Native Corporation and Choggiung, Ltd., is open to shareholders of their corporations. Ten participants (25 to 55 yrs of age; need not be employees; on the management track in any organization) receive two days of training twice a year and individual coaching in the interim over a three-year period. They also examine case studies of corporate business initiatives and are tapped as a focus group. The respective management teams (Tom Hawkins/Steve Tolton and Karl Potts/Alice Ruby) also tell great stories.

Since the ultimate product of any program is its alumni, it's worth noting that TWOW has 21 alumni scattered around Alaska and the U.S, including: a member of the Alaska Board of Fish, an Academic Principal, a COO, a VP/Lands, a VP/General Counsel, two stockbrokers, and senior managers for non-profits in the Bristol Bay region, among others.

Yukon Kuskokwim Health Corporation's Leadership Development Program was just launched in October. Fourteen participants (employees who are emerging leaders) gather monthly (Oct-May) for a two day session. Program components include experiential learning, guest speakers, group coaching, mentors, individual coaching between sessions, and a special project.

Guest speakers have included Evon Peter, Chief of the Neetsaii Gwich'in tribe of Arctic Village. Speaking of meeting Nelson Mandela of South Africa and leaders of the Six Nation Iroquois Confederacy, Evon Peter said, "Meeting a person like that is like seeing a great tree with roots running into the ground." November's speaker was Walt Monegan, Chief of the Anchorage Police Department and he has great bear and people stories. He also spoke passionately about his philosophy of "Citizens First" and instilling an organizational culture of "Honesty, Harmony, and Humor."

So what difference does this all make for today, tomorrow, and the day after?

Well, since it usually takes 17 years of professional experience to develop a CEO, it's worth starting today. Even though GE had a deep leadership pool to begin with, Jack Welch spent six years formally looking for and developing possible successors.

Don't have GE's resources, but still want to get started? Order Eighty-Eight Assignments for Development in Place by Michael Lombardo and Robert Eichinger of the Center for Creative Leadership. (www.ccl.org) \$15. It has practical assignments for developing talent.

And what does it mean for the day after tomorrow? Read Jean Giono's unforgettable story of an unforgettable character whose number is 100 acorns in The Man Who Planted Trees. (http://home.infomaniak.ch/arboretum/Man_Tree.htm) After you've read the story, you might remember that Western Alaska, the same country of the King Island skinboat captains, was once forested with Redwood trees (Sequoia). One interesting fact about Redwood trees is that they never grow alone. They grow so tall, in such harsh and shallow soil, that they require interlocking roots in order to stay standing. Alaska can still use leaders with interlocking roots.

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