

Consider the Possibilities

By Jackie Noble

DLA wants to be a world-class organization. How do we do that? Is there a standard solution? Where do we go for the answers?

Three members of the DDC staff went to the World Business Forum for two days of leadership presentations by some very well-known and respected leaders. Being a member of the DLA Leadership Council, I was excited by the prospect of finding the solutions to our challenges. Although I didn't find "the answer" I certainly learned that there are many ways to approach our improvement initiative. The presenters credentials were impressive and included Rudy Giuliani (former New York City Mayor), Jack Welch (CEO, General Electric), Anne Mulcahy (CEO, Xerox), President William J. Clinton, Philip Kotler (Northwestern University and author - *Marketing Management*), Jeremy Siegel (Wharton School of Business and author - *Stocks for the Long Run*), Louis Gerstner (author - *Who Says Elephants Can't Dance?* and former CEO, IBM), Jim Collins (author - *Good to Great*), and Ben Zander (Conductor, Boston Philharmonic Orchestra).

The presenters all had unique messages. Their visions and definitions of leadership and world-class were tailored for their organizations and framed by their experiences. Whether the leadership function is personal accountability, profit/mission accomplishment, finance, strategy, security, customer service/relationship management, self management, etc., their visions of leadership shared a common ground - **listening and communicating**. They spent a lot of time listening to their people and to their customers. Then, they did three things - focused on the issue(s), executed the action(s), and provided the leadership. All of which apply to leading a government organization. From my perspective, three of the presentations pertained directly to DLA.

Jack Welch is best known for turning General Electric (GE) around. He joined GE

from another company. His leadership style was aggressive and targeted managers and employees. Each site submitted a one-page paper on their organization's important missions/issues/challenges. He then made one-day visits to each of the GE companies, had the responsible employees brief their functions and projects (not the senior leaders), toured the sites and asked questions of the employees. Each employee he talked with was asked for their top five ideas for improving the company. Their suggestions ranged from reorganizing the production floor to new products and services to managing employees. Imagine the possibilities and opportunities that arose by going to the source! Imagine the immediate buy-in and support from the workforce! Imagine the employee's motivation for success as ideas were selected for implementation! Welch also strongly believes in immediate feedback - not just during appraisal time. Welch provided feedback to managers and employees and held his managers to the same standard.

Anne Mulcahy took a different approach. Rising through the ranks of Xerox, she felt she was already familiar with the employees' strengths and weaknesses. So, she focused on the customer. Her premise was that Xerox had great products but were the products/services what the customer wanted? Mulcahy contacted customers, listened to their issues and then focused the employees and the company on delivering what the customers wanted not just more of the same cookie cutter solutions. She shared the information with the employees and included them as an integral part of the solution development. She acknowledged success as each level was achieved. She even went so far as to make each of the senior executives the Customer Operations Officer for a day (on a continuing rotating schedule) that made the executives accountable for fixing the customer's complaint/issue even if it wasn't in their functional area. She never misses

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a big trade show so she can participate in round tables with Xerox competitors and customers. She assigned each of the senior executives a customer segment and they are responsible for keeping in touch with their senior executives to find out how Xerox is doing, where they can improve, and what the customer is doing (today and tomorrow).

The GE and Xerox movements to world-class success didn't happen overnight and not without some pain. But everyone - from top to bottom and across the companies - was to be a part of the change. Those that were successful were rewarded. Those that were not successful left the companies. Even more important is that the customers wanted the companies to succeed and were willing to make changes to position themselves for improvements. The customers were included in the change process and assumed some of the responsibility for helping to achieve the GE and Xerox successful change.

Both presentations were impressive. But, by far the presentation that had the most resounding impact on me was the two-hour discussion led by someone I would never have considered if I were picking a leader from the list of presenters - a conductor. But, think about it - a conductor leads people, never says a word but leads with his actions, receives and gives immediate feedback, and is always on a timeline. Ben Zander stated that no matter a person's position in the company that their commonality was that they all "stumbled forward together" - some with a bit more finesse but all were definitely going in the same direction. Whether they were stumbling forward for personal or organizational success, they were moving forward. The conductor's job is to take the lead and follow up on the rear to bring the group to a successful action. The conductor leads the practice (the movement

towards success), listens, and celebrates the fact that the employee is trying. Zander shared that if an attempt is not correct, the conductor must encourage people to try again urging all to “Find it fascinating!” He stated that to be a leader meant to remain open to the possibilities. There is always another way to play a piece of music, to touch a soul, to achieve success. As leaders and workers, we need to listen, practice, and celebrate.

None of these actions require a great deal of money to implement. But, they do require commitment, long-term commitment with tailored solutions. Foremost, they require leaders to be responsible and accountable to the company and to the employees; to make and keep listening and communicating priorities; and to keep a customer focus.

Can DLA make the grade to world-class? It is a question each of us has to answer.

But, I believe the answer is YES. We have dedicated, hard-working employees throughout the agency and have an important, tangible mission with customers whose lives depend on our success. To become world-class we need only to open ourselves and commit to the possibilities of greatness - together!

New DDC Mentoring Program Provides Opportunities for Professional Growth

The Equal Employment Opportunity Office (EEO) of the Defense Distribution Center (DDC) recently implemented a DDC-wide mentoring program for civilian and military employees.

The new program is designed to enhance individual career goals and the productivity of the organization. “Mentoring gives employees alternative avenues for professional growth and development-for both mentors and protégés,” said EEO Program Manager Patricia Compton.

Mentors and protégés are paired by a Mentoring Board based on the information contained in each individual’s application. The trained mentors will meet with their protégés at least twice per month for one year to work on the protégé’s developmental goals and objectives. The program is voluntary for both mentors and protégés, but participation must be approved by each employee’s supervisor.

“Mentoring is a proactive approach to providing career guidance and role models for employees, while at the same time empowering them to assume responsibility for their own career direction,” said Compton.

Compton cautions that “mentoring does not guarantee a promotion; it is not a one-time event; and it is not a substitute for supervisory counseling, coaching, or feedback.” Rather, she said, “Mentoring is a learning partnership between two employees for the purpose of sharing

knowledge and information. Mentoring provides employees with access to an opportunity for personal and professional growth and development, and is a mechanism to help employees develop skills and abilities to enhance their performance without the need of a classroom.”

Application forms for mentors and protégés are available on the DDC EEO website, <https://ddcnet.ddc.dla.mil/ddca/eo>.

DDC Mentoring Program



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