

MAKING EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP A HABIT AT TOHO WATER AUTHORITY

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TAP Resource Development Group's approach to leadership development is unique. Fortunately, what makes it a unique approach also makes it effective, and the results can be seen and felt throughout an organization. TAP Resource's approach is more personalized, improving communication and productivity by making effective leadership a good habit.

TAP Resource has been assisting TOHO Water Authority (TWA) in Kissimmee, Florida with leadership development services since 2003. Brian Wheeler, Executive Director of TOHO, has seen positive changes within his organization as a result of TAP Resource's unique approach.

What has been unique about TAP Resource's methodology is its ability to personalize the process for each individual, while still working towards a unified approach that benefits the entire organization and makes it work more effectively. Existing leadership behaviors are identified for each individual, along with a desired profile for their position. This enables managers to create leadership development plans specific to their individual needs and situation.

"Employees are more responsive," notes Wheeler. "They don't see it as a 'one size fits all' approach. They instead recognize it as 'This is me.'" He says that the process is able to "provide an affirmation to each individual's strengths, while showing him or her the areas that can be improved upon," and it offers a plan for making those improvements, thus benefiting both the individual and the organization as a whole.



North Bermuda Water Treatment Plant, TWA, Kissimmee, FL

Understanding the Four Leadership Practices—Participative, Directive, Charismatic, and Standard Setter (See Figure 1)—has been helpful in this process. Like most utilities, TOHO is an "Operational Excellence" type of organization which benefits from a Directive leadership style.

But while Directive leadership is important, it is also possible for it to become "top-heavy", to get out of balance. That is where an understanding

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of the principals of the other three styles is very helpful. Says Wheeler, "We had some people who were strong

in the other areas as well...but we also had some people who had what we call 'severely directive leadership' who could benefit from working on integrating the principles of the other three leadership styles...It is important to develop some balance."

The leadership development process was well-received by managers within the organization, and "people have seen the value in it," says Wheeler. However, he does note certain ups and downs during

the process. “There was enthusiasm the first year that started to wane the second year. We’re all busy people, and there’s a tendency to say, ‘I’ll get to that leadership plan tomorrow.’”

Fortunately this was easily remedied through an added accountability piece, and the enthusiasm returned. “The accountability piece kept people focused on it and kept them working on it. People have seen that it is a priority within the organization. They’ve seen that the different things that they’ve had to do have all presented value.” As a result of the leadership development process, Wheeler holds individual monthly meetings with each of his Direct Reports. “This one-on-one time has really improved communication and understanding,” he notes.

Better rapport and better communication lines are themes that can be felt throughout Wheeler’s Leadership Team, and these themes have improved the overall team dynamic. Rapport and communication improvements have also been felt on the Operations Side of the organization, where he has received positive feedback from the directors. “Most of what they do are things where some level of communication is involved. Anytime you can improve communication within an organization, there has to be a plus to it,” states Wheeler. Communication in this organization is very important. “The (leadership development) exercises require interaction,” he notes, “which improves the flow of information between individuals and performance within the organization.”

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In addition to improved communication and rapport, another result of TAP Resource’s leadership development process has been more accountability. The “exercises require you to do something within a certain period of time, and then there is a follow-up to say, ‘did you do that?’” This follow-up provides a thread which helps the

Leadership Practices

Participative

Team Builder
First among equals
Coach
Trust Builder

Directive

Authoritative
Conservative/Cautious
Firm/Assertive
Definitive

Charismatic

Catalyst
Cultivator/Harvester
Commitment Builder
Appeal to higher-level vision

Standard Setter

Conceptual visionary
Taskmaster
Assertive, convincing persuader
Challenger of others

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exercises to carry through. Goal-setting and performance management within the organization has been yet another benefit from the leadership development process.

When an organization takes on a new way of doing things, there is always the possibility for some apprehension in the beginning. Fortunately, Brian was already coming to understand the importance of leadership development when he heard about TAP Resource’s program. “Leadership is as important as anything within an organization,” he states.

If there was any hesitancy on Wheeler’s part, it was wondering how the process would be received within the lower ranks of the organization, which is understandable. It can be challenging to predict how different levels of supervisors will respond, and whether they are wondering if this new approach is simply the “Management Flavor of the Month, where this is something we will do for a little while, but then it will fade away,” says Wheeler. But the process has been ongoing, and now in its fifth year, Wheeler notes that “they recognize that it’s part of our way of life now, and I think that it has been well-embraced.”

Wheeler adds the following observation of TAP Resource’s leadership development process: “You don’t get overnight results. It is an incremental approach,” he notes. “We are trying to change habits and build different characteristics, and this takes repetition and persistence.”

And with the changes and strengthening of certain habits and behaviors, also comes the importance of a continuous process. “You don’t say, ‘okay, we’re finished with leadership development. Now let’s move onto something else.’ Leadership development has to be an ongoing thing within the organization.”