EA Insights

EXECUTIVE ADVANTAGE llc

Dear Friend,

Gobble It Up!

Ever been hungry? I don't mean an "*I think I could nibble on something*" kind of hungry. I mean an all-out, *"Feed me"* hunger that seems insatiable.

It's interesting. I recently saw both kinds of hunger (and a third category that I'll tell you about in a minute). Here's the catch, though. The situation didn't play itself out in the context of food. Actually, I was at a leadership conference. And so, the table that was set before folks was a smorgasbord of knowledge, experience, and insight...rather than food.

So, here's what I saw.

The first type of diner really wasn't hungry at all. These were folks, who'd paid their registration (or had somebody pay it for them), but spent most of the two days taking phone calls or wandering in and out of sessions. (Okay, they were seldom in, mostly out.) There was a wealth of information, there for the taking, and they let it pass them by.

I'd classify diner type #2 as *the casual eater*. These were the folks who nibbled a bit, to be social, but didn't take in much at all. Now, the casual diners were physically present for the sessions. In fact, many of them sat studiously attached to their laptops, but they only half-listened while they caught up on emails or surfed the Web. Others sat next to a friend and chatted as much as they listened. Now, I know we've all learned to multitask, but there's a time and a place for everything!

However, there was a third group. These were the folks who truly dined! You could just see them fully engaged. They soaked up the wisdom and the information that was being shared. Even though filled to the gills, the time flew by for this group, and the two days ended, not with exhaustion but with a desire for more. And, lest you write this group off as just including young and inexperienced leaders or leaders-in waiting, its members comprised many with salt-and-pepper atop their heads as well.

Call me strange, but I wish I could follow up with all of the people who attended the leadership summit. I'd check in with them this week, six months from now, and even next year this time to see how they've grown, what they've used, and how their organizations and teams benefitted from them taking those two days away from work. My guess is that those who feasted while on site will be those whose lives and organizations show the biggest return on the time and financial investment. And, isn't that what dining's all about -- not just eating for eating's sake, but enjoying a much broader gain.

Our emphasis in this month's edition of *EA Insights* is on the learning leader. Whether you lead a large organization, small group, or just yourself, tell me, have you learned all there is to know? Is there any ongoing value in continued education and/or coaching support? You probably can guess my answer, but read on to find out why I come out as I do.

And, if you're looking for a partner on your leadership journey, don't hesitate to call on your friends at Executive Advantage.

All the best,

June

June Melvin Mickens
Executive Advantage, LLC

Quick Links

EA Home Page

About Us

News

Contact Us

Join our Mailing List

"Quotes"

"Learning is not attained by chance. It must be sought for with ardor and attended to with diligence."

~Abigail Adams

"In the business world, the rearview mirror is always clearer than the windshield."

~Warren Buffett

"If you're not learning while you're earning, you're cheating yourself of the better portion of your just compensation."

~Napoleon Hill

"I do not believe you can do today's job with yesterday's methods and be in business tomorrow."

4 Reasons Why <u>You</u> Should Be a Learning Leader

**June Melvin Mickens, J.D.
Executive Advantage, LLC**

In Executive Advantage's work with leaders, we always include a module that allows folks to examine the characteristics of successful leadership. What's amazing is that, although representing different industries, regions, and even generations, invariably people identify some common threads that weave their way through the tapestry of effective leadership. And, routinely finding its way onto the list is the importance of ongoing assessment, learning, and skill-building for the leader.

To be honest, some of the people we have supported just have a love of learning. It's simply how they're wired. But, by no means, does everyone fall into this category. Nonetheless, by the end of our work together, the vast majority perceive the value in being a "learning leader."

So, whether you're a natural-born learner or you come at it kicking and screaming, here are some valid business reasons why continued learning is essential for leaders.

A learning leader is sharp. Have you ever used a knife that was dull? It made cutting difficult, didn't it? Though it was still a knife, it just wasn't a very valuable one at that moment.

Have you ever served under or with a leader who was dull? Not dull in terms of his or her personality, dull with respect to skills and knowledge. Little in this person's outlook toward or responses to situations has changed much over 5, or 10, or 20 years. That's a dull leader. He or she still carries the label "leader;" like that dull knife, though, his worth diminishes each day.

On the other hand, a leader who is committed to learning remains sharp (or regains his edge). We live in a constantly changing world. (Now, that's an understatement.) Exposure to new information, perspectives, and approaches enables a learning leader to stay abreast substantively of what's happening around him. Couple that with a focus on understanding people, especially his team, and a learning leader positions himself for heightened results. Becoming a student of circumstances and of people makes a leader more aware of the signs that change is occurring or is on the horizon. And, with this set of tools at his disposal, a learning leader is better able to comprehend, make decisions about, and continue to advance the organization's mission, even amidst change, than is a colleague who's been dulled by little commitment to growth.

A learning leader is humble. In three unrelated conversations recently, people lamented to me about leaders who sought to coach team members in areas in which they were notoriously lacking themselves. The irony was that, in each of these instances, the leaders challenged their staff members to critically assess themselves and to follow sound theory; yet, they seemed (at least to the staff members) to be unwilling to heed their own advice.

As a leader, it's critical to acknowledge that you don't know everything and don't always get it right. The question is how do you really know how you're doing? After all, it's hard for most people to see and hear themselves as others see and hear them. And, seeking feedback from one's inner circle may not be the answer because they often aren't impartial -- they think as you do, are afraid to tell the emperor he's not wearing any clothes, or have gotten so used to you that they've become immune.

Accordingly, one reality of leadership is that you frequently don't get the unbalanced feedback that keeps you humble, much less effective. Given that, it's incumbent upon every leader to be conscious of the tendency to "read her own press clippings," as a friend of mine is apt to remind me.

So, what's the solution? Every leader needs an unbiased presence in her life. An effective, learning leader will seek out someone who can serve as a brutally honest mirror, a helpful guide, and a trusted sounding board. It's important to identify someone who offers a safe environment where you can discover and/or reinforce who you as a person and as a leader; get a swift kick in the pants, when appropriate; figure out how you really impact those around you; and learn leadership lessons, steeped in experience and honed through opportunities for practical application, that will propel you both to chart your course and to meet your goals.

A learning leader is a model. Have you ever heard a child say something very un-childlike, wonder the origin of the statement, but then receive your answer when you met the child's parent? Well, something similar happens in the workplace. The culture of an organization or of a group is very much shaped by its leader -- intentionally or not.

Learning leaders realize, however, that words carry only so much weight. They

understand that their actions often speak far louder than their words ever could.

For that reason, if a leader expects the people in the organization or on the team to view ongoing self-assessment and continued learning as more than just a formality to be endured in order to meet some professional development requirement, he must model such behavior. And, "modeling" means more than just encouraging others to take advantage of learning opportunities; people must see you embracing them yourself.

A learning leader is good for the bottom line. Whether any of the previous reasons sway you or not, if you're a leader, this one should. Becoming a learning leader is good for the bottom line.

We're finding that organizations that consistently demonstrate results are ones that invest in creating environments that value organization-wide development and that encourage leaders to function in a manner that, on a daily basis, facilitates productive, results-oriented, and cost-effective behavior on the part of their teams. (Read that sentence again if you have to do so; it's powerful!) Translation: There is a direct correlation between establishing a learning environment and achieving desired organizational outcomes. And, as a leader, establishing that environment starts with you and is sustained by you.

So, if you're exploring ways to accomplish more of your organizational and/or individual goals, become a learning leader. Learning leaders:

- are sharp;
- are humble;
- are models for those around them; and
- are good for the bottom line.

Sounds like reason enough to me!

Executive Advantage

Solutions for Productivity and Profit

Strategy Session

Do you know:
Where you are now?
Where you are going?
How you are going to get there?

Let *Executive Advantage* help you find the answers.
Contact us today for a free personal or business strategy session.
No cost. No obligation.

Improved outcomes are just a step away. Contact *Executive Advantage* today **online** or at (301) 280-5950.

About Executive Advantage

At *Executive Advantage*, we are committed to providing results-based business and management consulting, leadership development, and coaching support. We partner with business leaders to build healthy, well-functioning organizations, where goals are met and people thrive. We also partner with individuals to create professional (and personal) lives with clearer direction, improved results, and greater balance.

To learn more about *Executive Advantage*, contact us **online** or at **(301) 280-5950**.

View our profile on Linked in