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## Leadership – And The “Extra Mile”

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Effective leaders understand the potential negativity of the phrase “go the extra mile.” They know success usually only requires “going the extra foot.” Sometimes, it’s just going the extra few inches.

In the 2010 “fastest man in the world” event, the indoor 60-meter dash, Dwain Chambers won the world title. Mr. Chambers bested a world class field of seven by sprinting 60 meters in 6.48 seconds. The last place finisher ran the same distance in 6.72 seconds. How interesting that a mere 24 hundredths of a second separated stardom from relative obscurity. How interesting that an approximately four percent “time spread” differentiated the race’s best runner from



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the race’s worst runner.

Effective leaders understand that the 60-meter dash is a metaphor for success in most aspects of life. Success seldom requires going the “extra mile.” Often, just five percent or ten percent more effort is all it takes to make a difference. Vice President Al Gore knows this all too well. After his failed presidential bid in 2004, Mr. Gore learned first-hand that success and failure can differentiate themselves by only the slightest of margins (and, in his case, some important judicial decisions which would not have required adjudication had the voting differential been, perhaps, just half of one percent greater).

Effective leaders inculcate a desire to succeed in others. They understand motivation is a critical aspect of their job. Therefore, they seek to foster a desire in others to do their best. In that vein, the phrase “go the extra mile” becomes a healthy positive leadership technique. In

fact, perhaps even graceful. Why? In ancient times, Roman law allowed a Roman soldier to require a “civilian” to carry his backpack for a mile. It was, however, only a Roman mile. A Roman mile approximated 1,000 paces, or about 1.48 kilometers. All but a very few could have possibly enjoyed the requirement. Rather, it is reasonable to assume most resented it. But, teachings of the time, as embodied in the New Testament, urged “civilians” to do even more. If the requirement was one mile, carry the burden for two miles. Hence, the phrase “go the extra mile.” Perhaps a phrase really asking us to extend ourselves, whether physically, mentally or emotionally, and thereby extend and enhance our inner grace.

Of course, the challenge for corporate leaders is to instill both a sense of self-worth and dedication in an effort to motivate each member of the team to give the project the extra effort. Ironically, success often requires much less than going the extra mile. Usually, just another five percent or ten percent.

Why is it that the difference between mediocrity and success can turn on such a razor-thin margin? How can it be that a mere five percent or ten percent additional effort can make such a difference? Often the difference between a grade of A or a grade of B (or the difference between first or last place in a 60-meter dash). Whether the grade is on an exam in high school or college, or in the exam of life.

Let’s consider a scenario in which many of us have found ourselves. Perhaps it was a demonstration we had been asked to make in our science class in high school on a particular chemical reaction, or a presentation in our English class about an author whose work was being taught. Perhaps it is a presentation to our

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colleagues on a particular issue or concept in connection with which we've been asked to lead a discussion. Each task is essentially the same. All the students in the science class are studying the chemical reaction. All the students in the English class are reading the same works of the author being studied. And, all of your colleagues have a working knowledge of the issue or concept about which you've been asked to speak.

In each instance, we can assume the audience to whom we are speaking had studied, or were as familiar with, the topic at about the same level as we when we were first tapped to give a demonstration or presentation or lead a discussion on the topic. We can also assume each attendee will continue to study and become more conversant with the topic, basically at the same pace as before. Why should they do more? They are not the person giving the presentation or leading the discussion. You are.

Regardless of the milieu, school or work, you want to know at least as much about the topic as the other attendees, and preferably more. Why? It just makes sense that, on the one hand, you don't want any attendee to embarrass you and, on the other hand, you would like to impress your teacher or your boss, and most likely your colleagues. You know everyone will be studying, and/or thinking about your presentation. Let's assume the presentation will take place in ten business or school days (we'll give everyone the weekend off), and that each attendee "puts in" one hour every other day studying or thinking about the topic. Hence, each attendee invests five hours, in total, in preparation for your presentation. Of course, they are not specially preparing. All they are doing is either their normal study routine or work routine. But, it is nevertheless a passive form of preparation. You, however, need to actively prepare.

Knowing you have ten business or school days, plus the interim weekend, let's say you decide to use every day to prepare for a half-hour each day. Hence, a total of seven hours of preparation (versus five for the attendees). Hence, your preparation time will exceed each attendee's by two hours, a 40 percent increase over the effort of each attendee. But, you want to shine during the presen-

tation so you "go the extra mile" and prepare for an additional two hours, thereby doubling your "extra mile effort." To do so, you only needed to add about eight minutes a day over the 14-day period to give you an 80 percent (four-hour) versus only a 40 percent (two-hour) preparation time advantage versus the five hours of each attendee. How did you do it? Perhaps you crammed the entire extra two hours the night before the presentation. It really doesn't matter. The mathematics is indisputable. By adding an average of approximately eight to nine minutes per day to your daily preparation routine, or a little less than 30 percent more effort (over the 30 minutes per day you might have only otherwise done), you increased your expertise level from 40 percent (seven hours versus five hours) to 80 percent (nine hours versus five hours). Hence, an approximately 30 percent increase in daily effort, in this case, produced the opportunity to create a "knowledge premium" of 80 percent versus 40 percent or a 100 percent increase in "extra mile premium."

The key is the "delta." The delta represents the measure of the difference between two numbers. Hence, if one student scores a 90 on an exam and another scores an 80, the delta is 10. Whenever we make comparisons, it's always about the delta. The delta reflects the differential. In this case, the calculation is the differential in preparation time which, in this instance, we are equating to a knowledge differential.

As we learned from the runner who finished last to Dwain Chambers in the 60-meter dash, when compared to others, it's not what you know or how fast you are. Rather, it's about how much more you know or how much faster you are (than the others).

Effective leaders well understand the "delta concept." They know absolutes may have worked for Lord Kelvin (who "discovered" absolute zero kelvin), but outside the laboratory, in the cauldron of real life, those who reach 212 degrees Fahrenheit bubble up to the top while the others at, say, 200-210 degrees Fahrenheit just float along with the masses. Imagine you at 212 degrees enjoying the bubbly delight of victory while your competitor languishes at 211 degrees in defeat or, at best, second place.

The point is elegantly simple. Effective leaders know they don't need a team of Stephen Hawkings to run a successful organization. They know that Mr. Hawking's knowledge of quantum gravity is perhaps only 10 percent or 15 percent greater than his peers in the field of cosmology and theoretical physics. That 10 percent or 15 percent delta, however, makes him a leader in his field. Mr. Hawking may be a genius to us, but in a field of geniuses he only needs to be 10 percent more of a genius. Similarly, effective leaders understand the application of this principle to every day corporate life. It's the principle of "relative expertism" (or, if you prefer, relative expertise).

They know if most have a knowledge level of, say, 7 on a scale of 10, the person whose level is at 8, or even just 7.5, is the expert. They know a mere 14.28 percent greater amount of knowledge (one-seventh), even half of that, can qualify an individual as an expert, at least relatively. And, as Einstein famously pointed out, everything is relative! Hence, effective leaders don't motivate for perfection, they motivate (others) to achieve "relative expertism." Effective leaders know that perfection is the saboteur of success. Imagine the team of a truly effective leader, each member a relative expert in his or her sphere of responsibility. Isn't that exactly the team an effective leader strives to assemble? Of course it is!

Effective leaders know all of their subordinates can be successful and achieve inner fulfillment from doing so. Success is measured in countless ways, oftentimes as basic as just "getting over the finish line," regardless of how long it takes. Just speak to some of those who finished at or near last place in the New York City or Boston marathon.

Effective leaders instill subordinates with the yearning for success and find countless ways to help them to achieve it. They may not know if it will take an extra mile (or if you are a Roman, 1.48 kilometers) to achieve success. But, they absolutely know that the smallest successes breed more of the same.

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*This article is an excerpt from Mr. Newman's forthcoming book, which will be published and available in 2011.*