

The Difference Between Leaders & Laggards

Get Smart: Gearing Up for a Downturn

One-day workshop led by Greg Bustin to help leadership teams finish 2008 strong and prepare for the economic adversity of 2009

September 26, 2008 • 8:30 a.m. – 4 p.m. • CityPlace • Dallas, Texas

\$595 per leader, \$545 for each subsequent leader from the same organization

Participants receive Greg Bustin's new book, *Lead The Way*

“Greg helped our leadership team focus on what’s really important to achieve our objectives.”

~ Bennett Cloud, President, Just Brakes

“Greg’s approach engaged our team. As a result, we’ve outperformed our best year by 250%.”

~ Jerry Smith, President, Integrity Integration Resources

Limited to 24 participants; go to www.bustin.com to register

Earlier this year, we indicated that we would examine principles, practices and strategies that have contributed to the success of other companies.

In my new book *Lead The Way*, we peel back the curtain on 12 companies that all started small. Today, they're big businesses. They're leaders in their industry. And they're among the most admired companies in the world.

In each case, you'll see that these concepts are fundamental. But as I travel throughout the U.S. visiting and working with leaders across a range of industries and in companies of all sizes, I continue to be struck by the fact that common sense is not always common practice.

The benefit of empowerment

The difference between leaders and laggards comes down to people.

Not just at the top, though that's where a company's employees take their cues.

Most companies – even manufacturers – rely on their employees to be difference-makers. That's because the products most companies sell are commodities. There's another one just like yours down the street or on the web.

So the easier it is for your customers to buy a product and the more pleasant you make the experience, the more likely it is that they will continue to buy from you. This premise, of course, assumes you're providing a quality product.

Nordstrom, Inc. was started in 1901 by two Swedish immigrants as a single shoe store in Seattle. On their first day of business, John W. Nordstrom and Carl Walin sold \$12.50 in shoes. From those origins, the family-run enterprise has expanded into a 180-outlet, 27-state chain, generating annual sales approaching \$7 billion.

Today, the company is organized as an inverted pyramid. Ray Johnson and other descendants of the founder recognize that sales associates are the organization's closest link to its customers. All functions of Nordstrom are organized to support the sales staff. Employees are given great latitude in solving customers' problems. This practice clearly delivers results: The firm maintains the highest sales per square foot of retail space ratios in the industry, nearly twice those of other department stores.

How can you raise the level of service you're now providing your customers? Have you fully empowered your employees to give your customers what they're expecting from you?

When you acknowledge that customers drive your business and not the other way around, you can keep bureaucratic red-tape to a minimum, keep your workforce focused and motivated, and keep your customers happy and coming back for more – even in tough times.

Lesson: *Trust your employees and give them the freedom to do what it takes to keep your customers satisfied.*

Take action

Ask and answer these four questions to improve your performance:

1. Does everyone on your team know how your organization defines success?
2. Have you communicated the activities that are non-negotiable and those where employees can use their discretion to help the organization succeed?
3. How do you reward employees' initiative?
4. What is the impact of loyal customers developed by customer-focused employees?

If you really believe your people are your most important asset, training and empowering them to take care of your customers makes good sense. ■