

How Business Owners Can Master Leadership

By Chazz Scogna



For business owners in the HVAC and duct cleaning industries, shifting from fieldwork to the office can be an overwhelming change. Instead of readying up the truck for the day's work, driving to service calls and interacting face-to-face with customers, your duties may now include paperwork and tangible in-house tasks like payroll and marketing.

But what about the intangibles? What about duties such as being a good leader? What about managing a group of workers, which means a group of different personalities? The business world constantly debates the manager-versus-leader relationship. A manager would be likened more to a boss – a supervisor who is structured and believes in controlling workers and the environment. A manager may “drive” because he or she doesn’t believe someone else can do it. “They may think that someone not doing it their way is a sign of disrespect,” said Melinda Allen, ASCS, owner of Allen & Company Environmental Services and speaker at NADCA’s 27th Annual Meeting. “We’re all humans, and egos get involved. It’s easy to start taking things personally rather than stepping back and saying, ‘We’re all on a team.’” A leader focuses on the staff, inspires trust and always has an eye on both workers’ and the company’s long-term success. He or she leads the driver, giving directions, but also giving them the opportunity to do the work. “They resist the temptation to micromanage and define a line between how involved to be,” said Allen. “They trust that they’ve hired the right people.”

Throughout many aspects of life, workers have had at least one manager and one leader. Think of the environment with each one. Did you feel the manager wasn’t as invested as the leader? Did the manager make failing an issue instead of seeing it as a learning experience? Would the manager ignore feedback from those who were directly involved in day-to-day operations, while the leader listened and thought of ways to improve based on the recommendations?

As you change over from the field to the office, here are tips for being an effective leader.

Be Honest

"The basis of all relationships, especially professional, is trust," said Allen. A lack of ethics will have your team and business facing the wrong direction. Employees want to work for a leader who is candid and fair – a high-character person who upholds the company's standards of service and morals.

Establish your company's goals immediately. "Let your employees know there's a bar for behavior and then show them you're a prime example of it," said Allen.

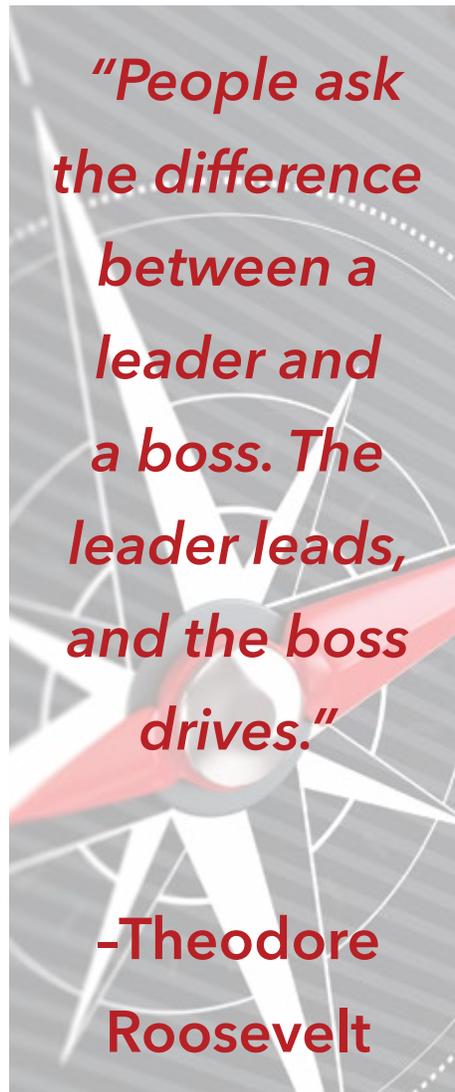
Inspire Others

"As a business owner and effective leader, you are the resident expert, but it didn't happen overnight," said Allen. Throughout the years, whether through trial and error, seminars or guidance from other experienced professionals, your work was molded by several factors. Effective leaders will do the same for a fresh crop of employees.

Most times, your employees can't match your years of experience, which makes you an authority and a teacher. Encourage your staff to think freely and to reach out for help if needed. Showing them that your business is a space for creativity and action will inspire your employees to look at things from different angles or improve upon certain aspects of the business.

Communicate Clearly

Think back to a boss who didn't



communicate. A boss who handed out tasks with expectations in mind but neglected any mention of what those expectations were. And, if the job wasn't performed to the exact standards, there was the fear of reprimand. It can stress a staff member working in the dark.

Communication comes in two forms. It can be verbal or nonverbal. Effective use of both allows a manager to ascend to a leadership role.

Nonverbal communication involves body language, mostly in reaction

to certain events. For example, an effective leader is engaged – making eye contact – when speaking with a customer or a staff member. Negative body language can include folding arms or rolling your eyes.

Verbal communication can range from enthusiasm to empathy. "Your business is where it is because you're passionate about air duct cleaning," said Allen. "Expressing that enthusiasm will show employees that you're both professionally and personally invested." Moreover, an effective leader is empathetic. Relating to your workers on personal levels shows that you care and see them as individuals. You are the face of your business. Effective communication starts at the top.

Delegate

As your business grows, so do your responsibilities. "It's simpler for a one- or two-man crew to keep track of accounting and future work, but eventually the workload is going to be too much," said Allen. "It can be stressful to delegate." Divvying up work to members of a team can seem more complicated than doing it yourself as an expert on your business. But remember that the staff was handpicked by you. They will bring additional expertise in areas across the board.

Also, delegating doesn't mean simply handing a task over to a staff member. While you should allow the delegates to operate with autonomy, give them clear directions for the assignment, with expected benchmarks and deadlines. It keeps you in the loop while allowing your staff to flex their leadership muscles. ●