For the past few weeks I have been reading “Corporate Excellence” by Dr. Jim Harris over lunch. It won’t take you a couple of weeks, as it is only 128 pages and well worth reading.

Harris walks you through the key components that contribute to corporate excellence, such as purpose, culture, people, building a leadership pipeline, and congruence. If you haven’t read the book, consider making the time. Here are a couple of takeaways I would like to share.

Management Excellence Versus Leadership Excellence

Near the end of the book, Harris explains how companies can go about achieving management excellence and leadership excellence. No, they are not the same thing. Management excellence can be defined as the successful supervision over specific goals. According to Harris, there are six skills for building management excellence — problem solving, planning and organizing, communicating, delegating, training, and motivating. If you want to build an effective leadership pipeline, you need to ground all managers, current and potential, in the six basic skills. The other component to building the leadership pipeline is to educate all mid-level and emerging leaders on the six roles of leadership excellence. These include: facilitator, coach, connector, emancipator, educator, and engager. Peter Drucker, considered the father of modern management thinking, has said, “Managers do things right.” Conversely, I once saw General Norman Schwarzkopf give a presentation. He said “The difference between a manager and a leader is managers do things right, while leaders do the right thing.” Companies need both to be successful.

I found Harris’s description of the roles of a leader very interesting and in need of elaboration. For example, an emancipator is not someone who just delegates someone to act on their behalf. An emancipator is one who allows people the freedom to succeed. Another role he describes is an engager. How does that differ from a motivator? Motivation is short term. An engager creates more of a long-term focus. If you have ever worked for a leader, you know of what I am speaking. You want to do well, not for the money, but because the person inspires you to be successful beyond the money you get in your paycheck. I have had the opportunity to work for several “true leaders”, such as Tony Ramy and Mike Pohleven. Both had the ability to energize their teams, even when the chips were down. I recall a time when we had to slash our budgets at Organon to zero, and we weren’t even midway through the year. Try selling that to your team without some inspirational guidance.

5 Retention Truths

I believe having great leadership is a key to good retention. Harris provides five retention truths. The first is if you pay peanuts, you get monkeys. He isn’t advocating getting into a bidding war over top talent, but don’t expect top talent to stay around and overachieve if you skimp on salaries. The second retention truth is that people may join a company, but they leave a boss. Top talent has all the choices and won’t put up with a bad supervisor. The third retention truth according to Harris is, lousy companies condone lousy managers. Great companies fix lousy managers. His third retention truth is — some people need to go away. This doesn’t mean the person is “bad”, but not a good fit. Want to turn around morale, get rid of these folk. Harris’ last retention truth is — retention is a leadership problem, not a human resource problem. “Leadership, whether strong or weak, ultimately determines the overall retention culture of an organization,” writes Harris. Thus, if you want to keep more stars, build a management and leadership pipeline.

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