



Monday Morning Leadership for Women

Notes by Frumi Rachel Barr, MBA, Ph.D.

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Publisher: Cornerstone Leadership Institute

Copyright year: 2004

ISBN: 0-9719424-7-1

Author's Bio: Valerie Sokolosky, is President of Valerie & Company, an international leadership development company in Dallas, TX. The firm's expertise has received front-page Wall Street Journal press coverage. For over 25 years, Valerie has influenced the corporate world as an international keynote speaker and author of seven books. Known for high energy and impactful presentations, Valerie has helped thousands reach their leadership potential using practical tips and poignant stories.

Author's big thought: The lessons shared between a woman and her mentor are essential for leaders at any level. Written with vivid stories and keen insights, this powerful book will help you achieve greater success as a manager, employee and person.

Notes:

Prologue

This is a story about Taylor Grant. Her career and personal life swerved off course and this is what she did to get back on track.

One of the greatest discoveries of her life was finding a mentor who could guide her through the stormy seas just when things seemed to be swirling out of control.

Taylor was a newly promoted manager.

At first, her team could do no wrong. They were accomplishing their goals. The team seemed to respond to her, and everyone was enjoying working together..

Her marriage to Michael was bliss.

Then things began changing that affected everything in her life.

Business slowed to a crawl, and productivity started to drag bottom. Competition got tougher, and pressure to perform was stronger than ever. All of a sudden, her team was not responding

to her. She was struggling to keep the team focused and productive. Upper management seemed to change directions often.

The problems at work spilled over to her time at home. Stress was mounting.

As a woman, she felt overwhelmed, trying to do a good job at work and still maintain the family life she wanted.

Suzanne Chambers was well known in Taylor's area as a highly successful business executive with a large architectural firm. Suzanne was a single mom who raised a son on her own to become a thriving adult. Suzanne recently guided her firm through a complex, but successful merger.

She was everything you would think of as a role model for successful women - polished and professional. She was also known to be a formidable competitor in the boardroom and yet cared deeply about her people.

It's not easy to be 'superwoman'. Suzanne sensed that this is what Taylor was trying to be.

Suzanne enjoyed sharing any lessons in business or in life because she actually had to learn most of them the hard way. She chose to help others bypass some of the pitfalls that caused her to stumble along the way, that's her reward.

Suzanne's parameters for mentoring Taylor included the following:

1. They would meet for an hour before work.
2. Starbucks was an appropriate place to meet, since it was about halfway between their homes.
3. Eight weeks seemed to be a realistic time frame for what Suzanne wanted to accomplish.
4. They agreed not to discuss Monday-morning meeting material or results during yoga, where they first met, a time they both needed to unwind and decompress.
5. Taylor would take action each week and try to improve situations they identified that were giving her particular heartburn.
6. Suzanne agreed to mentor Taylor only if she promised to take what she learned and share it with others. After their meetings concluded, she would teach others her leadership lessons and help them become leaders in their own right.

Those eight sessions led to a turnaround in her career and her family life.

The First Monday - From Steamroller to Leader

Taylor's questions:

What's the secret to being a good leader? Is there a secret formula? Do most leaders do things a certain way that works? What I could do differently to be more effective as a manager.

Suzanne's advice:

- Be prepared to take notes. It's hard to remember everything that's said at meetings. Having a planner and a place to keep the notes is a great idea.
- So much of being a good leader is common sense. Then again, being a good leader is not easy.
- Leadership is influencing others to follow. If you don't have followers, you are not leading anyone. Leadership is about working with and relating to people.
- Leadership has to be earned.
- Some people have the misconception that leadership is based on position alone. It's not the position that makes the leader; it's the leader that makes the position.
- Some people believe that leadership automatically comes with intelligence. Leadership is not based on IQ. Some assume entrepreneurs to be good leaders. Again, it's not always the case.
- To understand the attributes of a good leader, we have to begin by looking at where leadership starts. People are not born leaders. Leadership is learned and developed. It starts with who we are as individuals.
- Leadership depends on what we've learned from the people and the experiences that have shaped our values and our character.
- We've all had ups and downs in our lives. The values and character that leaders demonstrate in day-to-day business are influenced by those ups and downs and the people involved—some are positive and some are negative. What matters is that one reflects on these experiences and people and what lessons were learned.
- The first thing you've got to do is to become aware of the events and people in your past that have influenced you and the leadership lessons you learned from these experiences.
- Being a good listener is definitely a leadership trait.
- You can be intense in every part of your role, or you can choose to spend your energy where it counts. Just know that the perception you're creating is that you're a steamroller. People don't feel they have a voice. You come across too strongly. You can't force your ideas on others. You've got to let them think they can give you ideas and that you will listen.

The Second Monday - Rocks, Pebbles, Sand and Water

Taylor's review:

Lessons learned had been mostly from people and events outside her family. She explained the highs and lows to Suzanne and how they impacted her. She learned lessons that she had never looked at in terms of leadership. Now she saw the connection. Everyone was working hard, yet not getting everything done. Putting in more hours, but accomplishing less. It's a hectic pace involving a lot of overtime hours.

Suzanne's advice:

- Imagine a glass jar. The jar is your day, and it's filled with all kinds of activities and demands. We all have big rocks we have to fit into that jar every day. Those rocks are the large priorities that must get done. So you have to decide what your big rocks are for that day. Those are the jobs, responsibilities you get paid to do, and the activities your organization views as important and necessary to meet the goals and responsibilities you're measured on the your performance reviews. When time is short, you can't take these rocks out.
- The pebbles represent what you enjoy doing. The sand stands for those details you have to do in your job, like fill out reports or solve customer complaints. And the water—that's clutter that gets everywhere.
- Get people to recognize that when your door is closed, you need to be left alone. As for the team, since they don't have offices, have them hang red ribbons outside their cubes, and let others know the red ribbons mean DO NOT DISTURB!
- Take more control of time by limiting distractions.
- Eliminate meetings that aren't contributing to the bottom line and stick to it.
- Set specific time allocations for meetings and stick to them. Have a formal agenda and stick to it. Stick to your schedule.
- You don't need to be at every meeting.
- Stand up during meetings.
- Look for ways to prioritize and organize. Time management books tell you to handle paper only once. When something comes across your desk, either get it filed or take action on it. If it is informational material, put it in a folder marked 'read later' file. Then when it is read, either toss it, file it or mark actions to take.
- As for e-mail, checking it twice a day is enough—once in the morning and once in mid-afternoon.
- Say no to nonessentials. Stay away from office politics.
- Airplane time or any uninterrupted time is good time to do planning.

The Third Monday - The Platinum Rule

Taylor's review:

- During the past week, she had several opportunities to apply what had been discussed last Monday morning. Even at home, she took the advice to simplify and organize. One easy thing was to cook twice as much dinner a few nights and freeze half for the next week. Another time-saver was preparing much of the boys' lunches the night before.
- She liked the idea of approaching meetings with some new guidelines. No one questioned her when she limited weekly meeting to thirty minutes.
- One team member's feedback was that she was so glad they'd become more consistent about meeting times and agendas.
- Taylor recognized when she needed to shut her door.

Suzanne's advice:

- With all the work we have to do, it's important we use each other as resources. We all have our strengths, and we should get to know each other better as we work together more. But who's got time to get personal at work?
- Time is a valuable commodity, and most of us work hard at work. After work, our time is our own, not the organization's time. So how could your team get to know each other and you without spending time after hours?
- What's important here is to realize that we're all individuals—no two alike. Some people are open books, and others are more introverted. That's all. Some people think differently from you and communicate differently. It doesn't make your style right or wrong—just different.
- Some people are logical and analytical and more introverted. They may want quiet time after work—without socializing. Others are like Taylor, are more extroverted and people-oriented, and they love to be with other people. This is what makes the workplace so rich. It's called diversity.
- The Platinum Rule says, 'Do unto others as they would like you to do unto them.' Simply understand that your way is not always someone else's way when it comes to interacting at work.

- It is important to put yourself in someone else's shoes.
- Too often, managers try to manage everyone the same. And it doesn't work. Management has never been a one-size-fits-all discipline. Leaders, on the other hand, are great at discerning differences and building relationships. Therein lies the difference between leaders and bosses.
- Rigid people are doomed to fail because in today's workplace, flexibility is a key to success.

- Taylor was determined to view her team through a different set of lenses—looking at each person individually and recognizing what made them unique.

The Fourth Monday - Managing Sideways

Taylor's review:

- She realized that she apparently doesn't have much patience with people who don't react as quickly as she'd like. Her tendency is to just do it herself.
- She has a real problem when it comes to managing sideways with people who don't report to her. Working with other departments is trying to manage sideways.

Suzanne's advice:

- It's all about relationships. And it's about working collaboratively toward a clear goal. The trick is to agree on what that common goal is and what part each of you will play in achieving it.
- Most organization's operate under the 95/5 Rule. That rule tells us that workgroups understand 95 percent of what goes on within their own team. Of course, a small number of things happen that may be a mystery, but most of the time the team knows the majority of what goes on within their group.
- The 5 percent is what the team knows about other departments.
- If you tear down the walls and understand more of what's going on in other areas of your organization, it will destroy misconceptions of other departments, and teams can begin supporting each other.
- People do things for their reasons, not yours.
- You can't demand - only influence. Influencing is the best way to get others to do something while maintaining a positive relationship. Not only that, but effective influencing gives you an edge toward achieving your goals faster.

Here's what works for Suzanne:

- Have a clear goal and know specifically what you need to have the other person do before starting a conversation.
- During the conversation, consider what's going on within the other person's organization. Always check assumptions by asking. Maybe a peer is on his own deadline. Maybe he just returned from a business trip and has a lot to catch up on. You never know. So try to think about the other person's perspective.
- Once the situation is understood, work toward getting a shared commitment that includes specific time lines. Maybe this sounds complicated, but the time it takes thinking through these steps seems to help avoid clashes and confrontations at the other end.
- Pay close attention to working successfully across departments and nurturing these relationships. People respond positively to people they know, trust and like. Being client-centric—thinking about how each department serves the client. If we think in these terms, then everyone wants to work together. This type of culture encourages win-win relationships at every level.
- Your job as a manager is not only to pay attention to what your team does, but also to think about the whole process and how it connects with the customer.

- You must hold yourself and your team individually accountable for all cross-functional consequences.
 - First, be certain everyone understands the big picture.
 - Second, once the big picture is in place, you don't have time to make all the decisions. As manager, your job is to have a broad grasp of the business and to know how each step of the work gets done. Then you must depend on your team to know the details...so you have to teach them the business of the business. Let them be self-sufficient to get their various jobs accomplished.
 - Third, communicate to the max! Use a variety of ways to keep communication flowing. Use notes, conversations, e-mails and Post-Its to encourage this flow of information. Stay accessible. Encourage two-way communication and be a careful listener. With so many people handling bits and pieces of a process, communication is key.

- How should you manage a boss?
 - Start with putting yourself in someone else's shoes again. Anticipating your boss and his needs, and then trying to help him get what he wants?
 - Anticipate the boss's needs and help the boss get what he or she wants and needs
 - Solve problems that would satisfy two levels up from you
 - Know your boss's focus
 - Know the challenges confronting the boss, and then complete tasks that require only the boss's concurrence or sign-off.

The Fifth Monday - Living In Raplexity

Taylor's review:

- Her company is merging with another firm—a competitor! The rumor mill is running at warp speed, and of course she doesn't have any answers for her team—or herself.

Suzanne's advice:

- We're living in a world of raplexity. This means living in a business environment that changes rapidly, and, as changes occur; they are more and more complex. So put those two elements together and you get raplexity.
- So often, mergers and acquisitions cause people to worry, even to the point of losing productivity.

- You can tell them only what you know. There's nothing wrong with honestly saying, 'I don't know.' Just be careful not to add the words 'but I'll find out'.
- Commit to your team that as soon as you know something, they'll know. Say – "I don't know, but what can we focus on in the meantime until we get more answers?"
- Help people focus on things that are in their control. That in turn will sustain productivity.

- In Suzanne's experience as a leader, her management team was accountable not only for helping themselves but also to their employees and the entire firm as they successfully implemented the changes as quickly as possible.
- Think about positioning your changes positively. Educate the employees so they would put aside their expectations that change would go away.
- In Suzanne's experience, it was evident from the beginning of the merger activity that communication was vital. Employees want to hear messages about change from two people: the CEO or their immediate supervisor.
- Meetings gave them a chance to get resistance out in the open and to deal with it. The top obstacle to successful change is employee resistance at all levels. There are three reasons for employee resistance – lack of awareness about the change, comfort with the way things are and fear of the unknown.
- If they had not communicated regularly... the team would probably make up their own answers, and there'd be a galaxy of rumors spreading.
- Focus on productivity. People have a hard time letting go of the old ways, old cultures and old practices as change forces them to transition into a new environment and new ways of doing business.
- Their next challenge was to help people navigate through a transition phase that was filled with confusion and frustration. They knew that those feelings were naturally associated with a merger or any major change, and they wanted to develop a smooth transition from what was to what would be at their firm.
- Middle managers often resist change during transitions because of fear of losing control as well as being overloaded with responsibilities.
- Finally, they helped people embrace the new ways, systems and procedures, and showed them how to take advantage of new opportunities. They did this in six months, which is about the norm for a successful transition, and that short timeframe helped make it a relatively smooth transition where productivity didn't have a chance to drop for long.
- If it was necessary to make the changes in the first place, then productivity should actually be better after the merger than before.
- First, they got people to focus on critical priorities. Do the right things rather than hammer on doing things exactly right.
- People focused on their main things - those things that were important to the business and their customers.
- When changes occurred at their company, they set targeted goals, so each team knew their main things.
- They asked their teams to focus intensely on short-term objectives. They would then gain confidence from seeing the short-term goals achieved. When short-term objectives were met, they celebrated successes in little ways.
- As the manager you must put on your happy face. Just remember that the merger was done for good business reasons, some you may not be privy to. Management's role is to make the changes work.

- People fall into three categories based on the way they approach change. Twenty percent will get behind it and champion the cause. They'll look beyond themselves and commit to the outcome the organization is trying to achieve.
- Fifty percent will be fence-sitters. They will wait for direction without proactively taking charge of their own careers.
- Thirty percent will become defiant and will resist changes. They may even try to sabotage the process.
- The 50 "percenters" are waiting to be recruited. Get them involved and reward their positive behaviors.

The Sixth Monday - Hire Tough

Taylor's review:

- It was amazing to watch people through a different set of lenses last week. She especially noticed those 30 percenters and their behaviors.
- She started the search for new hires.

Suzanne's advice:

- Putting the right people in the right jobs will benefit the entire team. Hire tough and manage easy. It takes more time to find the right people.
- People tend to hire and promote in their own image.
- It's better to staff to your weaknesses so you can focus on your areas of strength.
- The important part of hiring is to find people like you in key areas such as values, attitudes and leadership ability.
- Hire talented people to create a strong team. Interview to make sure you have the strongest candidates.
- Be totally prepared so that you can be a good listener.
- Next, you have to know what you're looking for in terms of personality fit with the team.
- It's important to have a diverse team with differing ideas and work styles so you can truly leverage their strengths. Just be sure they share common ground in their character and values.
- Don't be afraid to hire people who are better in some areas than you!
- Get others to interview the top candidates. It's a good idea to have three people interview them and compare opinions.
- Look at three areas of need – competencies, attitudes and disciplines. Competencies are strengths, such as being a good communicator or negotiator and having the ability to make good presentations, sell ideas effectively or use certain computer software. Attitude is how they feel about working with others. Disciplines are the day-to-day activities and behaviors that drive the business.

The Seventh Monday - Balancing on Life's High Wire

Taylor's question:

How in the world were you able to be so successful in business while raising your son alone?

Suzanne's advice:

- Some basic principles:
 - Respect your family.
 - Do what you say. Kids don't forget. He learned to follow through on commitments.
 - Set goals.
 - Make home a special place.

- Motherhood actually requires highly efficient management skills: it demands organization, listening, pacing, coaching and guiding, leading, monitoring, handling conflict and imparting information.

The Eighth Monday - Helping Others Become the Obvious Choice

Taylor's review:

Taylor seemed much calmer and more in control of the pressures at work.

Suzanne's advice:

- Some people feel like their efforts alone will get recognition. That's not enough.
- Never expect what you don't expect. Learning to delegate is a good rule, but what you can never delegate is your accountability. The results will still reside with you. Learning how to macro-manage with micro understanding is critical to your project.
- One of your responsibilities as a leader is always to be focused on getting your top 10 percent promoted.
- Success is measured not by how well you are doing, but how well your people are doing.
- Managing people is a long-term learning experience. But leadership is really pretty simple. It's like the acronym K.I.S.S., which means 'keep it straight forward and simple'. As long as you keep your positive attitude and shoot straight with people, they'll work hard for you because they trust you. As long as people trust you, their productivity will be strong.

Recommendation:

This is a worthwhile read for both men and women concerned with common management issues.

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About the reviewer: Frumi Rachel Barr, MBA, PhD

Many CEO's find themselves asking "What now?" to sensitive situations that only an experienced former CEO can understand. Frumi is brought in to solve problems and often remains to work with you, as your confidante and secret weapon. She has an uncanny knack of getting to the heart of your corporate climate and maximizing your team's performance, profitability and sustainability.

To schedule a free *Break From the Pack to Success* consultation email

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