

Your Leadership - Is it bringing out the best, or limiting?

By Ed Oakley

My daughter Robin has been quite a teacher of leadership in my life. She is a very special woman who lights up any group she is in. I've never met anyone so quick to make friends and make a positive impression on all she touches.

Robin is also one of those people that managed to squeeze four years of college into five years. Upon completion of that phase of her life, she moved to Steamboat Springs to be a ski bum – which basically means you have three part-time jobs just to survive – but you get to ski a lot. I was definitely a bit jealous.

Two years into that experience, out of the blue, Robin called me and said, “Dad, this has been fun, but I think it is time for me to get a real job.” Wow, I was so proud. Part of me wondered if this day would ever come, so I was delighted. Then, she continued, “Dad, while I'm looking for a real job, do you think I could work for you?”

Robin moved to Denver to work for Enlightened Leadership Solutions. Everyone was thrilled to have her, as she added such a positive energy and a contagious laugh. She added a new level of joy and gratitude to the office.

My expectations were really pretty low for how much Robin would really help us. You see, she didn't have any background in marketing or business education that really fit our work, so I figured we were going to be paying her a glorified allowance while she found her “real” job. I figured we would just have her do odds and ends – simple things that most anybody could do.

It was in our first “all-hands” company review and planning meeting that I started learning about leadership from Robin. Everything was pretty normal during the meeting – except I was a bit surprised with all the excellent ideas Robin had. I remember thinking, “I wonder how she is coming up with all these ideas?”

But it was when we asked, “Who will take responsibility to take action on that?” that I was shocked. Robin quickly positioned herself in a leadership role, volunteering to do much of the book promotion work that was so important to us. “I would never have thought she had the capability to do that,” I remember thinking. The lesson she taught me that day, and many others as she did excellent work for us, was how easy it is to limit people by how we see their capabilities. I had put a glass ceiling over her, and thank goodness she was strong enough to blast right through it and teach me a big lesson about how poor leadership can limit people.

Leadership is about bringing out the best in people, not limiting them with our judgments and decisions about them. Assume the best from people, and they'll give you a lot more.

What limiting decisions have you made about certain people around you that might be holding them back? What new, Forward Focused™ decision could you make about them that might just release them to perform at a whole new level?

While it is really hard to admit that YOU might actually be contributing to someone's poor performance, what might be the value of shifting how you see them? What have you got to lose by trying it?

To the ever-learning “enlightened leader” in you!

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For additional information, products or service, please contact us:

Enlightened Leadership Solutions, Inc.

Phone: (303)729-0540 Fax: (303) 689-7666

ContactUs@enleadership.com

www.leadershipmadesimple.com

www.enleadership.com

www.makingmanagersintoleaders.com