

## **Building the Leadership Pipeline**

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“The only thing that is constant is change” – Anonyms

“It is not necessary to change – survival is not mandatory” – W. Edwards Deming

Take a moment to think about these two quotes, what are they telling us? Can you relate to them? As professionals, I am sure that we have all heard this before and as human beings we are designed to adapt to the changing environment. How we react to those changes and how our peers react to them are very different things.

Many of you I am sure have been exposed to – if not actually read the book *Who Moved my Cheese* which is a modern parable about four mice as they are exposed to the changes in the maze. Two of the mice sensed the change long before it happened and developed the skills and resources to adapt to the change – while the other two waited much too long. There are several similar modern day parables that one comes in contact with that can help us look for changes in our environment. For example – if you have smaller children – look at those books – *Officer Buckle & Gloria, I don't Care Said Pierre*, and *Horton hears a Who*. Each one of these stories relates to how people react to change and what is happening in someone's environment.

Yet, we tend not to listen and we tend not to prepare. Why? This is a fundamental question of leadership and personal development. Part of the reason that we don't is based upon fear – what is going to happen to me, do I have the skills, if I keep my head down nothing bad is going to happen to me? Most of this is related to a sense of security. Those with a lesser need for security may be able to adapt faster and respond to change. Also in some cases fear or the ability to go outside our comfort zones is a good thing – as it allows us to grow. But, the fear that causes us to want to stay in the comfort zone is actually very harmful and works against you rather than for you.

Why would I be talking about change and fear as it relates to building the leadership pipeline? First, the ability to recognize change and to be able to do something about it is one aspect of leadership. This aspect of leadership helps us first to prepare ourselves for those inevitable changes and then allows us to present a calming force in the storm. Others look to those who prepare as for guidance. Those who are preparing for the future – and have the ability to mentor prepare others for the future as well. Thus, it is essential that if we are going to build a profession that is adaptable, strong, and willing to take on the challenges that face us today and tomorrow. One has to be able to adapt to change and recognize the change long before it happens.

Fear hinders our ability to develop leadership in ourselves and others. It is “fear” that works against us. Fear prevents us from being proactive and as such not addressing those items that help us to grow because we fear for our position, our job, and perhaps our station. It is interesting that organizations that find themselves in a death spiral is because no one is willing to take a chance, do something different, or is willing to recognize that something has changed. Fear prevents us from taking action.

## The Pipeline

So, what does all of this have to do with building the pipeline? First, one must understand that there is a pipeline and what it is. In this case we are talking about how do we develop the chemical professionals that are needed for the future. If one follows the demographics, one notes a distributing trend – enrollment in science is down, enrollment in the chemical engineering is down, enrollment by US nationals is down, while at the same time we see an increasing need for a scientifically literate public. Part of this we must blame upon our selves. Are we making science interesting? Are our industries providing a viable career path for our graduates? Are we providing our graduates with an exciting future with stimulating research?

One only has to take a look at the want ads – to realize that the answers to many of these questions is a resounding NO. Not only that but those who are currently working in the profession are leaving for the same reasons that we aren't attracting people into the profession in the first place. Compound this problem with gender or race issues and you begin to see a downward spiral.

What once was a promisingly full pipeline is dwindling to a trickle and perhaps is in danger of drying up. What do we do? While – admitting that you have a problem is the first step, i.e. admitting that you have the opportunity to make a change. You cannot continue to do the same things and expect a different result. Think about this for a second – if you did the experiment the same way day after day – do anticipate a breakthrough. Of course not – yet we continue to use the same tried and tired techniques for encouraging people into science or to develop professionals.

Thus, we must begin to think differently – experiment – look at new parameters. Perhaps, we tackle leadership from within. If you were to ask me when I first became secure in my job – what do you think I would answer? Is it tenure? Is it financial security? The answer is not really any of those things. It is pretty simple – the realization that the worst thing the company could do was fire me.

That simple statement is an extremely powerful one. Why? Because, by understanding that I was able to begin to plan for the future – what skills do I have and what do I need? How much money do I have in the bank? What security blanket do I need? Are the folks in my group capable of taking over for me? How are my files? All of those things are now in the back of my mind so that I can plan and prepare.

This has also led me to the thinking that I can work myself out of a job and allows me to encourage and develop others. Thus, I am taking responsibility not only for myself but for making sure that I am filling the pipeline behind me. If I don't fill that pipeline – how am I going to move on to something else? The business books call this succession planning – I call it job security. The more you able to fill the pipeline behind you – developing the people, bringing new people into the organization – the more vibrant, exciting, and enjoyable the world becomes.

Leadership is not something that the company or organization has to do – it is essential that we as professionals be out there developing it. It is part of what it means to be a professional. We have to show the refinement of the process. We have to be responsible for the development of ourselves, our peers and the future. Think about the

artisans – those that developed others, encouraged others, provided for excitement but bringing in the fresh ideas – found there art to grow and prosper. While those that were secretive found there art to be lost. Is the same happening here?