

Leadership Lessons From An Aluminum Tree

Relationships Reflect On Results

By Kendall C. Wright, President of Entelechy Training and Development, Inc.

Have you had the experience of comingling or mixing together two very separate, disconnected, or perhaps even disjointed ideas and coming up with a keen insight? Well it happens to me quite often. As we enter into the holiday season, I found myself musing over some childhood memories of Christmas, specifically the Christmas trees.

Being a child of the 60's, I remember a holiday fashion trend involving artificial Christmas trees. Today, it's not too difficult to find artificial trees in practically any color you can imagine, but that wasn't always the case. I recall in the late 60's through the early 70's we had an aluminum Christmas tree (think aluminum foil). It was the coolest tree. What elevated the experience to a totally new level was the rotating multicolored floor lamp that shone on the tree. As the multicolored panels of the disc paraded in front of the lamp, the colored light reflected off the tree and throughout the room. With those colors alternating, rotating, and circling, we had a psychedelic Christmas atmosphere that would make George Clinton proud. It was so cool.

That memory reminded me and reinforced for me the importance of workplace relationships. More explicitly, it reminded me of how the quality of the relationship between a leader and the direct reports "colors" everything that happens in the workplace. When the direct reports feel that their relationship with the leader is respectful and healthy, the direct reports tend to be positive in their perceptions of both job satisfaction and the organizational culture. Additionally, those same direct reports tend to be more proactive and productive. Conversely, for those direct reports who experience the leader in less than positive ways, their perceptions of the leader, and the organization, are tinted and have an adverse impact on inclusion, engagement, and profitability.

Relationships pay dividends. Leaders must invest in building quality relationships with associates to ensure the maximum return of investment on human capital. Failure to do so will result in a dramatic decrease in the levels of personal investment the associates make in the actualization of the organizational mission and vision.

Just as the multicolored floor lamp completely altered my perception of my childhood Christmas tree, the quality of the work relationship between the leader and the direct reports has the same impact on practically every important business metric.

Nearly every relationship starts out neutral, like an aluminum tree. The leader's effort to engender honesty, trust, and respect will determine the "color" the relationship takes moving forward. The Actualizing Leader knows that consciously and intentionally investing in relationships helps everyone to see "green" where it really counts – at the bottom line.

Leadership Lesson: Every child of the 60's remembers the aluminum Christmas tree. That tree came to life as the multicolored floor lamp projected alternating colors on the tree, changing the perception of the tree with each oscillation. Relationship starts out as neutral as an aluminum tree, and they take on the color we give them. The leader's effort to demonstrate honesty, trust, and respect will determine the "color" the relationship takes moving forward. Leaders who invest in the quality of the work relationship are "coloring" the relationship so things can predictably come up green at the bottom line.

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