

Leadership - It's What's For Dinner!

Perhaps Leadership Incompetence Isn't A Tasty Entrée.

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

You have to be very careful when asking some people, "What's for dinner?" If you remember the down-home comedy of Hee Haw, you'll recall the skit, "Grandpa, What's for Supper?" Through a glass-less window, Grandpa would announce the evening's menu, "Well, Albert and Blue caught a coon, and I baked it in the sweet tatars 'til nearly noon. There's wild onions wilted, and fresh lettuce too – and enough strong coffee for the whole darn crew. Yum Yum. And in line with the unsophisticated hospitality of the Beverly Hillbillies, Granny might offer you a giant bowl of possum stew!

One of the most successful and enduring American advertising campaigns ever, is the Leo Burnett masterpiece for the Beef Checkoff Program. The slogan, "Beef. It's What's For Dinner." was an appeal to add beef to a healthy diet. That same slogan should also serve as a menacing siren to everyone in a leadership role. At the end of the day, while your direct reports are relaxing over the perfect ribeye, odds are the conversation will venture into their perceptions of your competence as a leader. So, in the real world - "Leadership, it's what's for dinner."

Invariably, dinner conversations will include observations about things at work. But to the more trained ear, the comments are a candid critique of leadership competence. How commonplace are the laments regarding communication, fairness, accountability, and recognition? Even as Aunt Sue's award-winning green bean casserole makes its debut, evidence of severe and intense exasperation with leadership is obvious. The mood thickens and darkens. It doesn't take long for someone to suggest a new topic of discussion so as not to spoil a wonderful evening. Perhaps leadership incompetence isn't a tasty entrée. It surely has a tendency to leave a bad taste in the mouths of many direct reports.

The current levels of employee frustration and dissatisfaction are too high to ignore or attempt to minimize. Many leaders would rather find excuses than hold themselves accountable for contributing to the escalation of dissatisfaction among their direct reports. In a revealing research project, conducted by Barrett & Associates, a consulting firm in the San Francisco area, it was discovered that as much as 69 percent of the variability in employee fulfillment is attributed to leadership competence. Translated, that means when we as leaders get really good at leading, our direct reports become really happy about working with us.

As a leader, you may find it a beneficial exercise to pay attention to the dinner conversation this weekend as you dine with friends and family. During the conversation, dinner-mates will reflect on the challenges of the week, or even some of their chronic critiques of those in leadership roles. Before you join in, listen to the observations. Their complaints and comments may be a great coaching tool to assist you in becoming the best leader you can be.

Leadership Lesson: Employees seemly can't help complaining about leadership shortcomings and skill outages. Nowhere is that more pervasive than over "steak and potatoes." Conduct your own research; take inventory of the behaviors and practices that leave a most unpleasant taste in the mouths of those in your social network. "Leadership. It's What's For Dinner."

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