

# ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT SOLUTIONS

## Show and Tell: Leading Through Actions

by Kelly Graves and Liz Bilinsky



*"Your actions are so loud; I can't hear what you are saying." Ralph Waldo Emerson*

A leader's actions—more than his or her words—will determine the culture, attitudes and behaviors of the workers in the organization. Communication specialists, scholars and psychologists have long agreed that nonverbal or body language communicates the great majority of our meaning whether we know it or not. Successful leaders know this. They face the good times with the same clear vision as they face the hard times. They speak the truth in spite of conditions. They listen and watch for accurate information to inform their choices. Through thoughtful self-reflection, careful attention to a variety of cues and a commitment to congruence in their words and actions, these leaders will inspire great dedication and powerful outcomes.

**As a leader, what kind of behaviors are you modeling?** What you give is likely what you will get in return.

**Are you accessible or too busy?**

**Are you accepting or doubting?**

**Do you invest in creativity and innovation or are you cynical?**

**Do you share the limelight or monopolize it?**

**Do you see failures as opportunities or shame others for their mistakes?**

**Do you pursue truth actively or passively accept the status quo?**

**Do you require accountability or**

**"pass the buck?"**

**Is follow-through the norm or do projects, ideas and people come and go like "flavors of the month?"**

**Do you listen or mostly talk?**

Leaders should model how to successfully discover and then work through these truths, not hide from them. Given these examples, employees will sense, feel, observe and *act* on a leader's tone as much—if not more—based on his or her words. A leader's covert and overt behaviors *do* make or break each communication event and strongly influence its subsequent outcomes. John Quincy Adams said, *"If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader."* If the outcomes leaders are seeing are not inspiring; if they are not up to par, then it is up to the leader to dig deeper and find out why. It is up to the leader to speak and act in ways that produce results.

There's an easy way to find out what you are communicating. Look around. Listen to what is said and *not* said in your presence. Notice what is avoided or repeated. Walk around and observe the work culture. If you are the true leader of the group, the culture will represent your values. If you are feeling courageous, create an environment where your people can appropriately communicate their needs, ideas and evidence-based opinions without negative consequences. When you've had time to reflect and summarize on the themes of what you've gathered,

you'll be ready to respond to and acknowledge these truths. Rely on your feelings and instincts to guide you on what to say and do next. This may be uncomfortable at first, but if you focus on the process or 'how' you are communicating while keeping the content relevant and speaking to the truths for your organization, you will inspire your people.

If you wish to increase the match between what you say and what you do, here are some important considerations:

- Show what you mean. (When you have something to say, as soon as possible after you speak, model your meaning.)
- Mean what you say. (If there are any exceptions to any rule, make sure they are rare and few. Then, be careful to explain the rationale for that exception.)
- Observe and reflect on your own behavior at work. (Would you be proud to have your words and actions displayed on the 5 o'clock news? Would you want your employees to emulate your actions and your words?)
- Ask for evidence-based feedback from your people.
- Filter your words and actions through this criterion: If it doesn't impact your internal and external customers in a positive way, it probably doesn't need to be said or done.
- Finally, follow through. (Never underestimate the power of the follow-through. It may be one of

the single most important things any leader can do to inspire great outcomes.)

"The leaders who work most effectively, it seems to me, never say 'I.' And that's not because they have trained themselves not to say 'I.' They don't think 'I.' They think 'we'; they think 'team.' They understand their job to be to make the team function. They accept responsibility and don't sidestep it, but 'we' gets the credit. This is what creates trust, what enables you to get the task done," said Peter Drucker.

Given these considerations about showing and telling their employees the hard truths, leaders will make significant improvements in every aspect of their organization through better service, respect and communication with their employees. In this way, these leaders will inspire great achievement through good times and bad because they will be trusted to speak the truth and act with integrity every time.

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liquid. The heavy metals go to the bottom of the tank, are stored in drums and then later disposed of as hazardous waste. SECO isn't allowed to dump their buckets or any coolant down the drain. Other machine shops in the county, however, aren't regulated and can regularly dump coolant down the sewer. According to Marcia Ames, supervisor for industrial waste for the city of Redding, this is going to change soon.

The city of Redding is working to set local limits for similar-type of businesses by the end of this year, she said.

"Larger machine shops will be the first to have to come into compliance with these limits," Ames said.

SECO has a pretty clean environmental record, she said. They had one small problem. After separating out heavy metals and cleaning everything up, their coolant contained lead. Puzzled, they finally discovered it was coming from their mop water! This was quickly remedied.

Things like this can happen, Ames said.

"It's tough doing the kinds of things [SECO's] doing. You can't just look at the

water and say there's a problem," she said.

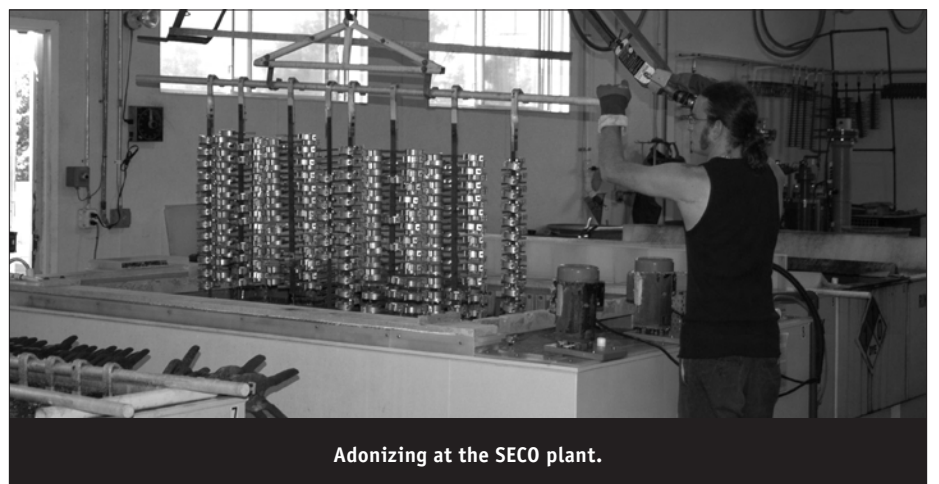
To comply with environmental regulations, SECO submits a hazardous waste materials business plan to the county. It inventories their chemicals and details how they handle them.

SECO has other environmental practices.

Because they sell in Europe, their boxes must meet EU mandates for content and type. These cost more, Ogden said, but they go through a lot of boxes. SECO works closely with its box supplier on this.

Aluminum sheets are cut to size in SECO's state-of-the-art machine shop. The by-product, which looks like a silver confetti mountain, is compressed into what looks like square blocks of tinfoil. They sell this compressed product to a certified waste hauler from Chico, who picks it up, then melts it down and resells it.

The hauler separates the heavy metals, categorizing everything onto a waste manifest. This goes to a certified waste recycling center, then is sent back, showing where it was hauled, who the driver was, etc. SECO keeps track



Adonizing at the SECO plant.

of these manifests. The city of Redding and the county like to check them to ensure materials aren't going to the central landfill.

SECO spends \$100,000 a year in metal recycling. It costs them \$4,800 to \$6,400 per haul.

It's the cost of doing business, Ogden said. "People want to take shortcuts, but you have to build it into the cost of your product."

"We've been doing recycling for years," Ogden said. "It's part of our costs. It pays for itself. As a business owner, it's part of my responsibility. You

generate waste; take care of it. I want to see clean lakes and rivers for the next generation to come. This planet is the only one we've got."

Innovators in their industry, SECO may have raised the environmental bar for other businesses.

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