

Leadership lessons from youth at risk

Inside Tucson Business August 7, 2006



“What’s missing in the world, whether in business, health care and virtually most service businesses is excellence, leadership and service,” said Gale Standen founder and Vice President of v3 Tucson. V3 Tucson works with a population of young adults at risk through

drugs and alcohol in a small, intimate, long term setting and helps them create and get excited about their contributions to life.

The model developed by v3 is reminiscent of a model brought forth by Robert K. Greenleaf in his book, *Servant Leadership*. It is based on the idea that excellence, leadership and service are the major ingredients of success – in life and in business.

Business people wrestling with issues of motivating people, creating teamwork, creating leaders and good customer service can learn a lot by understanding v3’s model and watching the well dressed, positive, socially adept former alcohol and drug addicted “kids” at v3 serve the community of Tucson with joy, style and grace.

Whether they are helping a neighbor clean their yard, building an addition on their property or for someone else, cooking dinner for the community or a host of other services this attractive competent group performs in the community, it is impossible to miss their positive contributions to life. Residents work on their education while at v3 and after graduation, most continue on to complete University studies.

The biggest challenge most firms face and the biggest challenge being faced by those at v3 working with youth at risk is the needed paradigm shift from solo to community focus to create leadership, excellence and service.

J.M. Juran in his landmark book, *Managerial Breakthrough*, said that in order to create change the organization needed to drive out fear and to understand current conditions. The foundations of Standen’s model are: “create an environment that is a safe place to fall”, and “you can’t change what you don’t acknowledge.”

“After arriving at v3, each resident inadvertently re-creates what has not been working in their family life. That is actually the beginning of taking responsibility for different choices. They experience the choices they are making both with the staff and their peer group. Everybody at v3 eventually wants to raise the bar and so when there is a negative experience going on, they all reach out to create newness together,” said Standen.

My experience working in corporations on leadership development parallels Standen’s view that short term solutions are limiting. The industry

standard is a 30 day model. “The present short term model seems to be inefficient because there is not enough time for the young adults to modify their behavior and to create a life for themselves,” said Marni Standen, President of v3. The same is true for leadership development in businesses. Three day seminars have very little effect because the format is lecture and not experiential and there is insufficient time to modify choices.

“Over time, the v3 participants get excited. They are already aware that what they are doing isn’t working; however, they do not arrive seeing the impact of their negativity. V3 gives them a chance to see that. We stay away from lectures. The effective part of the whole process is really experiential,” said Gale Standen.

The families are also coached, sometimes daily but definitely, weekly. They are coached on new parenting skills and they have support while they create boundaries which we call loving detachment. As the resident changes the families are encouraged to stay abreast and stay very informed about the transformation that is occurring in their offspring’s life.

The parallels in the business world are that the managers of the leader being coached need to be coached as well. Change happens within individuals but it also happens within the framework of an interactive system.

Best practices of v3 that can be used in any business are:

1. Be willing to change your mind about what you think
2. Each person is so individual, address them individually
3. Start with a staff focus on excellence, leadership and service.
4. Be aware of the environment and the people
5. Encourage each person to discover if they are a team player or a chaos creating solo player
6. Provide the joy of showing people how to create possibility
7. Provide ability for them to feel the pain of old idea consequences
8. Stay present in the moment
9. Provide nothing less than the best we can possibly contribute

Sharon Youngblood is a Certified Management Consultant, Executive Coach and Speaker. She works with companies and individuals to improve performance and profitability. Contact her at say@youngbloodconsulting.com or (520) 795-7498. Additional articles are available: www.youngbloodconsulting.com