



tom brown
inside
leadership

Walk The Talk!

It takes time, staff, budget,
and personal energy.

TOM BROWN



The manager had just received some anonymous feedback from his subordinates. It strongly indicated that they didn't think the manager "walked the talk." *Say again?* The explanation is really quite simple. The company was as overt as any in displaying its corporate "mission, vision, and values." But in this particular department, there was a feeling that the company — and this specific manager — said one thing, but did another.

He didn't walk the talk!

So how does a manager convert intention into action, words into deeds?

There are four major tools, which must be used unsparingly, to align one's achievements with one's ideals.

First, the manager must demonstrate company or personal beliefs through the use of time. When Jerry Junkins took the helm at Texas Instruments, he knew he needed to signal how TI should start walking its latest talk about quality and dedication to customers. Time became a key tool. Corporate calendars were purged of wasteful meetings, perfunctory reviews, and presentations.

Why? So managers could spend more time with customers, gaging their thoughts and needs. Further, TI revised its sales forecasting and bookkeeping processes from a monthly to a quarterly basis. The rationale was the same: "Managers [could spend] less time crunching numbers and [have] more time to think about customers."

The company also inaugurated its famed “Project Easy” program, insisting that the first allocation of time for all 77,000 employees was to “make it easier for customers” to do business with TI.

Second, the manager must demonstrate company or personal beliefs through the deployment of all staff. It’s up to each manager to discern how best to employ, utilize, or treat each person, so that he or she feels empowered.

Consider Robert Swanson, the CEO at Genentech, who wanted to make sure his people understood that they had to remain “pumped up” in the face of keen competition.

So one morning he staged a fire drill, shuffling hundreds of employees into the company parking lot. But there was no fire. Instead, employees and managers found Swanson leading a pep rally, in which he implored everyone to catch the competitive spirit. And so the assembled staff, in addition to their normal jobs, also became “cheerleaders.”

Third, the manager must demonstrate company or personal beliefs through the allocation of budget. Many managers insist that their budgets are so tight that there is little room for discretionary spending — no matter what the cause. But putting real dollars behind key ideals is what managerial leadership is all about. What you spend money on is seen as a managerial priority.

Consider Motorola. When the company decided it wanted to truly become a global competitor, it reportedly followed the typical American corporate practice of allocating about 1% of payroll for training its employees. But its managers changed that — doubling the numbers, by some accounts — and launched a sweeping, all-employee training regimen in the “Three Ts”: technology, teamwork, and total customer satisfaction.

And who’s to say that this dramatic statement, with dollars rather than just words, wasn’t the linchpin in making Motorola the revered, world-class competitor it is today?

Finally, the manager must demonstrate company or personal beliefs through the display of personal energy. A few years

back, I read a *Wall Street Journal* story about Frank Meeks, then in charge of a Domino's Pizza franchise in Washington, D.C. He required his store managers to run 10-kilometer races before weekly sales meetings and to go on group vacation/business trips every three months. And he awarded family vacations to top performers and urged workers to chant while making pizzas.

The point: The way Mr. Meeks channeled his vigor, his personal drive, became an exclamatory indication that he intended to personally translate Domino's credos into daily operations.

These four tools are there for any manager to use. He or she is hampered more by lack of personal imagination and creativity than by corporate traditions or regulation.

But make no mistake: It's critical that managers — above everyone else — walk the talk. Why? Robert Haas, CEO of Levi Strauss & Co., perhaps put it best in *The Harvard Business Review* on the manager's role in bringing Levi's "aspiration" statement to life:

"Managers in an empowered organization can clear away the obstacles to effective action that exist in any large organization. In most companies, including ours, there is a gap between what the organization says it wants and what it feels like to work there. Those gaps between what you say and what you do erode trust in the enterprise and in the leadership, and they inhibit action. The more you can narrow that gap, the more people's energies can be released toward company purposes."

Tom Brown is a champion of vanguard thinking about leadership.

The author of hundreds of articles, he also wrote the first online book on leadership: *The Anatomy Of Fire: Sparking A New Spirit Of Enterprise*, which explores the look and feel of leadership in the 21st Century. To learn more about Tom, including his major role in *Business: The Ultimate Resource*, the largest handbook/database ever on managerial leadership, go to www.tombrown.us.

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