

Do the Right Thing

For any leader there will always be aspects of your job that you don't like—things that you personally find difficult or distasteful. And while there is always the temptation to postpone or ignore those things, hoping they will just go away or somehow solve themselves, this is seldom the case. Invariably, those neglected responsibilities come back full force at some later time—usually with far greater impact or consequence when they do.

Another mechanism to cope with these undesirable duties is to assign them to a subordinate or pass them off to some other person in the organization. While doing this may relieve your immediate distress, it is never a good thing to slough off your duties because they make you uncomfortable.

While undesirable duties will be different for each individual leader, these are some of the “usual suspects.”

Confronting Poorly Performing Employees. Our basic nature is to assume that others know the right thing to do and will do it without being told. Clearly this mindset is not based in reality. People need to understand the right way of doing things and the standards of the organization. When they do not meet these expectations, you must engage them. Initially, these are ongoing discussions of what must be improved. Eventually, continued problems must lead to counseling and possibly disciplinary actions. A leader must never be hesitant to confront the problem employee. The sooner he does it, the better for everyone.

Discharging Employees. No normal person enjoys letting people go. Even when an employee deserves it for his inappropriate behavior or poor performance, it is never a pleasant thing to do. If, after exhausting all efforts to correct behavior or improve performance, the employee's problems persist, it is the right thing to do for the good of the organization and the other employees who have to put up with or cover for the offending employee.

Responding to Unhappy Customers. Does anybody enjoy this? However, it's probably one of the most important things you can do to ensure the success of your business. Recognizing that there will always be service failures, recovery is always the key. View these challenges as opportunities to demonstrate your leadership and professionalism. Well-handled, these situations can win you respect and admiration.

Reference-Checking when Hiring. Few of us enjoy the tedious time commitment and challenges of checking applicant references, yet there is nothing you can do that's more important for “getting the right people on your bus.” This is a responsibility that you, as a leader and hiring manager, should never take lightly or pass off to someone else.

Speaking in Large Public Gatherings. Speaking in large gatherings causes many of us to cringe. Yet to grow leadership abilities and increase influence, don't shy away from these opportunities. The more you speak in public, the more comfortable you'll become doing it.

While it's perfectly appropriate to delegate certain tasks as your career progresses and subsequent positions grow in authority, you must make sure delegation is appropriate and that your motivation is for the good of the organization, not based on what you like and dislike doing.

As a leader, you should never shy away from the responsibilities of the position you have accepted. Make it a point of honor to do the right things. Your employees are always watching and taking your measure as a leader. When you consistently do the right thing, you'll be seen as a "stand up" person—one who will always have their trust, respect, and loyalty.

Ed Rehkopf, Excerpted from Leadership on the Line – The Workbook, Clarity Publications, 2009