

Leadership and the Bully Pulpit

According to Wikipedia “A bully pulpit is a public office of sufficiently high rank that provides the holder with an opportunity to speak out and be listened to on any matter. The bully pulpit can bring issues to the fore that were not initially in debate, due to the office's stature and publicity.”

The term was coined by President Teddy Roosevelt who frequently used the word “bully” to mean “superb” or “wonderful” and who recognized the power of his position in advancing causes or promoting ideas such as the creation of a National Park System.

While hospitality leaders from General Managers to front line supervisors do not hold public office, the concept of a “bully pulpit” for leaders is just as real and can be just as effective in swaying the minds of employees. This is particularly so when the leader is respected by her employees.

Some topics or areas where leaders can use the bully pulpit with their employees include:

- Convincing employees of the benefits of joining the organization’s 401k Retirement Plan.
- Creating and fostering an organizational culture of service.
- Building and sustaining a sense of commitment and teamwork.
- Encouraging and advising employees on education and advancement opportunities.
- Instilling a sense of ethics and professional behavior through the example of word and deed.

Using the bully pulpit is usually not a one time event. An important idea or issue often requires ongoing promotion to make an impact on employees. Take the case of President Gerald Ford’s *Whip Inflation Now* campaign. After immediate ridicule of the idea and the “Win Buttons” in the press, the plan was dropped, never to be mentioned again. Needless to say it never went anywhere despite the pressing nature of the issue.

On the other hand, take the example of Al Gore’s persistence in advocating green energy alternatives, even in the face of withering long-term criticism. Whether you agree with his politics or not, it ultimately won him the Nobel Prize and green is now on everyone’s agenda.

Leaders, particular those who are effective and respected, have a wonderful opportunity to use the power of their positions to influence employees for their own good and the good of the organization. Don’t miss an opportunity to make a difference by failing to recognize the power of your own “Bully Pulpit.”

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