

The Abundant Leader

“People with a scarcity mentality tend to see everything in terms of win-lose. There is only so much; and if someone else has it, that means there will be less for me. The more principle-centered we become, the more we develop an abundance mentality, the more we are genuinely happy for the successes, well-being, achievements, recognition, and good fortune of other people. We believe their success adds to...rather than detracts from...our lives.”

Stephen R. Covey

I love the idea of abundance. I don't see abundance as a philosophy. I see it as a lifestyle. People who lead an abundant lifestyle see their universe as infinite. They demand win-win scenarios in their personal and professional lives. In their world it is not just acceptable for everyone to succeed..... It is an imperative. Compare this to a lifestyle of scarcity, or what some call a zero sum philosophy, in which the universe is viewed as finite. This particular outlook requires that for every winner there must be a loser.

A scarcity or zero sum philosophy is not compatible with effective leadership, because effective leaders are those that are committed to assuring that everyone they lead is given the opportunity and resources to succeed. To an effective leader, realizing one's dreams is a universal goal.

Taken a step further, leaders who embrace a scarcity philosophy believe that their role as leaders is to identify weaknesses in others and judge others by their weaknesses

rather than their strengths. This is a lose/lose scenario, because dueling on weaknesses seldom creates a positive result for either party.

Abundance-based leaders are the antithesis of scarcity-based leaders. They understand that each of us has weaknesses, but they choose to judge others by their strengths. Their dental practices are always more successful because they know how to identify strengths and position their people so that they are able to successfully develop and utilize their strengths. The result is a culture that benefits the practice while providing the employees a sense of accomplishment and empowerment. Also, it has been my observation that in the abundant culture which stresses development of strengths, the weaknesses are likely to spontaneously disappear. It is my belief that this is the direct result of a culture that is accepting of failure and views deemphasizing weakness as a means of developing strength.

An abundance leader who identifies and utilizes others' strengths creates a very different kind of culture than does a scarcity leader who continually tries to correct weaknesses in others. The scarcity-based culture is an overall negative environment. The staff is always afraid to make their own decisions or try new ideas, because failure in itself will be viewed as a weakness. In an abundant culture, the staff is comfortable making creative suggestions and trying out new concepts because they know that failure will be viewed as a necessary part of the growth and development of their strengths.

The contrast between the two lifestyles becomes most obvious when applied to a business model or, in our case, a dental practice. Imagine a practice culture in which the doctor/leader attributes achievements to their staff and is the first to accept the blame for failures. What would it be like to work in an organization in which the leader was fully

committed and engaged in assuring that everyone reached their full potential and realized their individual dreams? This is an organization that will prosper.

Now compare this to a practice culture based on scarcity, in which recognition is coveted by the doctor and seldom shared with the staff. Compare it to a culture in which the leader has an emotional need for control. This scenario—quite different from the abundant culture—will lack spontaneity, creativity, and member development. This is an organization that is in trouble. It will likely crumble because the burdens created by the leader's scarcity mentality cannot be supported by the weakened cultural infrastructure.

Abundant cultures are participative as well as being creative and adaptive. They are able to tap into their vital stream of human potential which is a prerequisite for a highly productive and culturally mature organization. They promote self-development and self-direction. Such organizations are the icons of their industries.

Herb Kelleher, the untraditional CEO of Southwest Airlines, said this about his organization's culture: "A financial analyst once asked me if I was afraid of losing control of our organization. I told him I've never had control and I never wanted it. If you create an environment where the people truly participate, you don't need control. They know what needs to be done, and they do it. And the more that people will devote themselves to your cause on a voluntary basis, a willing basis, the fewer hierarchs and control mechanisms you need."

Is it any wonder that numerous studies have proven that organizations that create cultures based in abundance are significantly more profitable than those organizations whose culture is scarcity-based?