

The Leadership**Impact** Newsletter

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The Platinum Rule

From *Leading Others, Managing Yourself* by Peter McGinn “**The Last Word: One More Law**”

“There is another law that many managers follow. In fact, many have told me that it is the centerpiece of their management philosophy. That law is the golden rule: Treat others as *you* would like to be treated.

As this book is closing, I would like to offer one more law, the successor to the golden rule. It goes one step further. I like to call this variation the *platinum* rule. The platinum rule directs you to *treat others as they would like to be treated*. The golden rule begins with fairness and equity. The platinum rule adds empathy. Together, they are a powerful combination.”

From Bryan K. Williams “**The Double Platinum Rule**”

“The attendant had given me what I wanted, but I was still upset. ... I thought about the Platinum rule and how it may not be sufficient in all situations. So the Double Platinum rule is ... “treat others the way they don’t even know they want to be treated”. To boil it down...anticipate, anticipate, anticipate. Don’t just meet your customer’s expectations, EXCEED them.”

Treat others the way they would like to be treated, not the way you would like to be treated. (Platinum Rule.) –McGinn’s 14th Law of Management

When I do my workshop entitled “Leading Others, Managing Yourself” based on my book by that title, the story and the work place principle that always make the biggest impact almost didn’t make it into the book. I inserted the *Platinum Rule* as the last two paragraphs in the book, almost literally the “last word” as it is referred to in the sidebar on the left.

There are two reasons that I think account for the impact. The first I will discuss here, and the second reason will be on page two.

When I introduce the platinum rule, I usually begin with the story of the very expensive, very special gift I bought my wife, Marilyn, for her first birthday after we were married – a great Kenmore canister *vacuum cleaner* from Sears. It was, I believed at the time, an inspired choice. It was so wonderful that I made the presentation of it to her an elaborate game, building up the excitement through a series of hints and clues. Needless to say, my good intentions did not create the reaction I expected.

I don’t have to get very far into the story before every woman in the workshop begins to groan. Even most of the men laugh at me – except for those still too young to know better.

The lesson is obvious. It takes no great insight to see that good intentions – even as basic as conveyed by the golden rule – are no guarantee of positive results. Treating someone else the way you want to be treated is great theory, but not necessarily great practice.

In theory, theory and practice are the same. In practice, they are different.
– Yogi Berra

That’s why the story is so helpful. It takes a principle that is so well accepted as “gospel” and in a simple but compelling way reveals it to be only a partial truth. Immediately, most people are able to think of their own examples, where they have either made the same mistake as I did or been the recipient of such misplaced good intentions.

When we follow the golden rule, we are behaving ethically and reaching beyond our own self-interests. In light of all of the business and financial scandals of the recent past, that might seem to be good enough. However, a humble story about the gift-giving naïveté of a young husband shows that even more is necessary if you want to touch others in a positive way – whether you are talking about leadership or great customer service.

See Also Sidebar and Next Page.

The Unexamined Life

"It ain't what you don't know that gets you into trouble. It's what you know for sure that just ain't so."
– attributed to Mark Twain

I think that is the second reason that the vacuum cleaner story is so well received. Not only does it cause workshop participants to rethink their conclusions about the "golden rule," it also encourages them to reassess other assumptions that have previously gone unexamined.

Over the years, I have interviewed hundreds, if not thousands, of managers and executives and asked them about their philosophies of management. Many will tell me proudly that their cardinal values are fairness and equity. "I won't ask anyone to do something I wouldn't be willing to do myself, and I follow the golden rule" is a typical answer. It is not a bad answer, but I could get the same answer from a person with much less life experience, a high school class leader, for example.

That is because we form many of our key beliefs from the things we are told when we are young, usually by our parents or influential teachers. Having once accepted them as true, we build further beliefs on top of them without ever re-considering our foundation. In his autobiography, Twain is especially brutal on this point. He says, "In religion and politics, people's beliefs and convictions are in almost every case gotten at second-hand, and without examination, from authorities who have not themselves examined the questions at issue but have taken them at second-hand from other non-examiners...." Ouch!

Two month ago, in April's issue, I wrote: "Test yourself. Are you ready to look a bit more deeply into areas that normally go unquestioned by you? If so, it is time to open up and engage in real dialogue with a coach or some trusted friends and colleagues. In the case of certainty, you might ask yourself questions like: Why do I feel so strongly

Here are some of the laws that come out in our workshops that cause people to stop and review their assumptions about leadership:

7. There is no "*Right Way*." Your job is to choose the option whose negative consequences you're best able to live with at the time.
 8. If everyone is doing it, either it is the wrong thing or it is too late.
 17. If you are not the bus driver, then drive from the back of the bus.
 18. Seek out people different from yourself.
 20. A bad decision made by a group is still a bad decision, even if everyone likes it. And a good decision is not a good decision if no one accepts it.
 25. Life is not all about work. Even work is not all about work.
- Chapter 3, Leadership is an action, not a title.
Chapter 6, If you and I are always in agreement, one of us is not necessary.
Chapter 7, If you are coasting, you are going downhill.

about his? Why do I react so strongly whenever someone raises a contrary point o view on this topic? Why am I so certain that this is the way it must be?"

You may be satisfied with your answers. If, however, you identify some certainties that now seem habitual, shallow, or outdated, you have prepared yourself for more learning from experience. That is what the workshop on Leading Others, Managing Yourself brings to so many participants – the opportunity to learn more from experience. Through

a series of shared stories and lessons drawn from our own everyday work and personal lives as well as models from the business literature, we are able to consider new ways of doing things that will have more consistent, positive, and sustainable impacts than the trial and effort approaches based on left-over slogans and homilies of our youth.

Once we become reminded as managers and leaders of others that we have the range of experiences and the obligation to improve what we find and not merely run the same plays over and over, most executives find this energizing. Getting the opportunity to ask

ourselves whether we have had the desired level of impact in the ways that we expected normally leads to a burst of creative energy and broader thinking. In terms of physics, it provides the occasion for a quantum leap, i.e. a change that happens all at once rather than gradually, as something old is seen with new eyes.

Just as in so many other settings, a little humor and a little humility open a person to more insights and a better understanding of how the world works, especially when the world does not behave rationally or logically. The vacuum cleaner taught me an important lesson, and I have been able to share it with thousands of others. At least some good came from that afternoon disaster.

For more information, see <http://www.leadershipimpact.com>

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