

As A Leader, Are You Invisible?

By Liz Bywater, Ph.D.

In my work with leaders in healthcare and across industries, I hear a similar refrain time and time again. *I am way too busy. My calendar is completely jammed. I don't even have time for lunch.*

Sound familiar? In today's nonstop, 24/7 business environment, most leaders find themselves with rapidly escalating demands on their time. Without fail, there is too little time to accomplish everything. All too often, the result is a growing disconnection from the staff.



It's a challenge. The fact is, active business development, exploration of mergers and acquisitions, international travel, navigating changing regulations and market conditions... all require an escalating amount of a leader's time and attention. But if you fail to get in front of your employees – inspiring them, providing insights into the marketplace, offering them the *why*, and soliciting ideas from the front lines – you will lose them. They will become less creative. Their enthusiasm will wane. They will begin to question why they're working such long and exhausting hours. And soon, they will begin looking for more compelling opportunities elsewhere.

There's no doubt, CEOs and other top executives must protect time to think strategically, look to the future, meet with key partners, and attend to communication with customers, investors and the media. Still, you cannot afford to become invisible or inaccessible to the staff. You should be reaching out regularly, in formal and informal ways. Here are three straightforward approaches:

Town Halls: This is a great way to get your message out to the entire organization, convey a new direction, provide context about developments in the marketplace, and foster optimism in the workplace.

Walking the Halls: This approach is more informal and should be a part of every executive's toolkit. Leaders should be visible to employees across the organization on a regular basis, saying hello, asking questions about what's working well, learning where the real issues lie, and

gathering new and innovative ideas.

Skip Level Meetings: Leaders can tap into the ideas, experiences, and enthusiasm of staff by meeting with employees at multiple layers of the organization. Periodic “lunch with the CEO” opportunities or “coffee conversations” should be offered throughout the year.

Investing time with your staff is not a luxury, it is a strategic priority. Your employees need to hear from you. They need to speak with you. They need to see you. Don't allow yourself to be invisible.

Some of you have asked me what happened with Bill, the executive I wrote about in last month's “Dr. Liz on Leadership” column. You wondered: *Did Bill deal with the performance issues of his staff? Did he figure out how to let his poor performers go and rebuild his team, despite his compassionate nature? Did it ever get any easier?*

Here's what happened. Bill never did “get over” being a very nice guy who disliked exiting people from the organization. But he didn't let his personal discomfort get in the way. Taking my advice, he looked beyond the small number of individuals that had to go, and he focused on the bigger picture: The team needed colleagues they could depend on. Bill needed to be able to delegate and receive high quality work from his people. He had no time to babysit or cajole. Instead, he needed the right people in the right roles doing the right things. Consistently. Independently. Reliably.

Bill built the right team and the results followed. *Do you have your best possible team in place? If not, what's holding you back?*

I hope you've enjoyed this edition of “Dr. Liz on Leadership.” Each month, I will share new ideas, tools and advice to help you thrive in today's ever-changing healthcare environment. Let me know what's top of mind and I'll answer your most pressing questions in future columns. Contact me at liz@lizbywater.com.

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