

# The Mentor Minute

Canada's leading consultants share their favourite tips and techniques.

Dave Crisp focuses on speaking to groups about the keys to leadership learned from mountains of trial and error in 14 years heading HR at Hudson's Bay Company among other challenging roles.

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## Balancing Leadership

with David Crisp, Speaker, Coach, Consultant – Leadership Effectiveness

A former CEO used to say leadership is the most powerful force on the planet. Unfortunately his flawed style lost us \$300 million in 18 months. Effective leadership can multiply positive results, but bad leaders destroy value and disengage the best people even more quickly. Two years will often do it either way.

Most organizations lack enough people with really good skills, yet the formula is not difficult. There's a clear recipe that works well if you apply it consistently and avoid what some McKinsey-ites recently called 'dismal' counter-practices. I liked that - dismal - good description for a lot of what we see.

The recipe? Dozens of books, articles and experience boil down to just five skills:

**Be positive:** If you say or even think that someone is stupid or lazy, you'll get what you expect along with powerful passive resistance. Praise them for forward thinking and they'll strive even harder to supply it. Jump to take your share of the blame if things go wrong. Shield them; you're the leader!

**Be honest:** If "we're" not there yet, say so. We can all get better, but encourage them with support, brainstorming that includes their ideas and get them motivated to try again. Don't sigh and do it for them. Express faith!

**Be strategic:** This requires combining 1 and 2 with their ideas to find a new way to forge ahead. That's a challenge, but one worthy of the thinking time it takes. Successful companies like Toyota, Southwest Air and Walmart constantly implement many small ideas suggested by staff at every level.

**Be action-oriented:** That means trial and error, not waiting for grand scale perfection. Better habits grow with practice. A culture is no more or less than everyone's habits. Make it a learning one in which errors in good faith are not just OK, but valued.

**Balance continually:** Balance is the key in every aspect of these and much more. Avoiding 'dismal practices' means finding and balancing many factors including what's good for the individual and the organization every time, not just when it's convenient, and many, many more.

The mark of a truly great executive or leader is the ability to balance and make steady progress among competing demands by testing better and better solutions with at least the objective that everyone wins. Recognize change takes time and consistent effort. But the rewards are huge and build momentum both in individual careers and organization success.

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