



***“Confessions of a Compulsive Neurotic (Some Hard Lessons in Leadership)” featuring Rod Odom, former President, Network Services, BellSouth Corp.***

**Comments:**

- As an obsessive-compulsive neurotic, had to learn that perfection is not always the goal.
- “The perfect is the enemy of the good.” –Voltaire
- Also tended, as a young manager, to always think I had the answers. Remember one situation, when there were many problems, when I controlled the discussion. One report finally got up and said “I’ve been elected spokesperson. When you get up and outline the problems and the answers, we don’t feel comfortable saying anything.”
- Was transferred to BellSouth Advertising. Went to BAPCO meeting and didn’t understand anything they were talking about.
  - Gave me the Privilege of Ignorance: Can ask things that incumbent would be embarrassed to ask.
  - Learned also that going into a new situation it’s easy to think you know things that you don’t.
- Need to develop courage to stand up and say “I don’t understand”:
  - Philosophy course at UF in which he understood nothing the professor was talking about. During the third class, another student stood and asked the class if anyone understood what was going on and the class agreed that they did not. He was elected spokesperson to tell the professor that they did not understand. It turned out that the professor was teaching a course that was third in a sequence of courses and had to revise his teaching for the semester!
- Realized he didn’t have to be in control of everything.

**Lessons:**

- 1.) Having the right people in the right jobs.
- 2.) Ground rules: knowing what is important and how to behave; the team needs to self-monitor, not the leader.
  - a. Be honest.
  - b. Behave.
  - c. Debate and dissent in the room.
  - d. No we/us/them: example, “They decided...I didn’t agree...”
  - e. Attack the topic, not the person.
  - f. Hear the words and the music: know what’s really going on.
- 3.) Communications: communicate clearly and frequently

- a. I didn't always communicate what I wanted.
  - b. An organization must always understand what you are trying to do and why you are trying to do it.
  - c. Share goals, strategies and tactics.
  - d. Provide a set of common experiences to create a common understanding (i.e. books, team meetings, etc.).
- 4.) Participative Management: lots of ideas; focused on process, not results; think about "why am I doing this;" emphasis on quality.
- a. If people don't have the skills or knowledge, it doesn't work.
- 5.) Frontline-centric: Sam Walton understood customers and employees.
- a. "Technician-centric" was our focus in Network.
  - b. Wants to visit the field and not have people sweep problems under the rug, but pull the rug back. Wasn't a "royal visit."
  - c. People Initiative: \$6B payoff—if we are 90% effective, we could be 95%. That's 300M worth spending.
- 6.) Focus on Coaching and Development
- a. An organization is only as good as the sum of its parts.
  - b. In one example, supervisors didn't know what their people were doing.
  - c. How to coach depends on where you are.
- 7.) Do the right things in the right way.

**Additional insights:**

"My experience in the company was that 'something was missing' in how we talked about and 'developed' leadership. For me, the Turknett Leadership Character Model – with integrity as its foundation (which I felt was already in place) – added the important aspect of the 'balanced scale.' A balance of 'respect' and 'responsibility' and the related characteristics gave our people a complete picture (example) of how leaders should behave. (This is NOT a commercial for Turknett, rather it's what I believe.)"

On women in leadership: "I think it's good to share common experiences. I'd simply say, be comfortable with who you are – whether you're a woman or a man."

On not being a team player: "Sometimes you will have someone in an organization who doesn't 'get' the importance of the Leadership Character Model or the type of leadership that is desired. If the person can't be a team player, he/she may have to go."

On rumors in an organization: "I've found that negatives fill voids, so it's typically better to deal with these rumors, communicate the facts, provide accurate information, and give people the 'why' behind important decisions."

On lessons from Ron Mumm, former Angel pilot (who also worked for BellSouth): "After a mission, the highest score/evaluation ever given was a '7' – because even though the mission may have been executed almost perfectly, there were always lessons to be learned, improvements that could be made. Also, during these debriefs, 'rank' was left in the hallway, everyone was listened to as an equal. The lesson here is that as a leader, you don't need to use your position and title to impress others. More important to be open and honest."