

DISCUSSION GUIDE



FLIGHT OF THE BUFFALO

*SOARING
TO EXCELLENCE,
LEARNING TO LET
EMPLOYEES LEAD*

JAMES A. BELASCO & RALPH C. STAYER

A New Video From

*cor***VISION**
M E D I A

Length: 30 minutes

Code: #78

The American buffalo gather in a herd and are solely dependent upon one leader. Wherever the leader goes, the herd will follow. Without the leader's instructions and directions, they cannot function either as a group or individually. The herd's entire destiny and survival is determined by one.

Geese, on the other hand, not only fly in a fascinating, high precision formation, but every single bird within the group knows exactly where they are headed and is ready to take over the leadership position at any given moment. Based on these metaphors, Jim Belasco and Ralph Stayer, authors of the book *Flight of the Buffalo: Soaring to Excellence, Learning to Let Employees Lead* share some startling insight and evidence with narrator Colin Siedor as to what positive results can be achieved within an organization when managers make the commitment to empower and involve employees in the leadership process.

A corVISION Media, Inc. release produced by Dystar Television, Inc.

Leader's Guide written by Kathleen Neville

For managers and supervisors at all levels of the organization.

©1994 corVISION Media, Inc.

OBJECTIVES

Viewers will:

- Understand that today's competitive advantage lies in the ability to tap the capacities of all people within an organization, not just a few in leadership positions
- Consider the different and important changes a leader must make in his/her own behavior in order for employees to take the lead
- Examine the dramatic results organizations have obtained by involving all employees in the leadership and decision-making process
- Analyze the ways in which an organization can

empower its employees and motivate them to make good decisions

- Embrace the importance of letting problem-solving take place at the level where the solution is needed
- Realize the advantages of making the customer, instead of management, the center of the organization
- Understand why it is important that every single employee have a personal line-of-sight connection with the customer
- Learn the importance of not only creating customer satisfaction but finding out what helps a customer succeed

SYNOPSIS

Jim Belasco and Ralph Stayer not only believe buffalo can fly, they have actually helped make it happen.

As authors of the book, *Flight of the Buffalo: Soaring to Excellence, Learning to Let Employees Lead*, they have eagerly assisted many organizations in replacing stifling “orders coming from the top-down” management styles with an exciting and inspiring approach to leadership which has virtually lifted all kinds of American companies and government agencies right off the ground. According to these two successful business owners and consultants, the credit for these impressive results achieved by companies who find their profits heading skyward—goes straight to the employees.


Many organizations are discovering that when employees are allowed to lead, some pretty amazing things can happen. For example, employees at the Furon Company, a \$300 million manufacturer of polymer seals, hoses and gaskets, learned firsthand just how satisfying it can be to play an active part in shaping their own company’s destiny. These empowered employees, representing all aspects of their organization—from machinists to first-line supervisors—presented their product to their largest customer. Not only was it a different approach to have the customer meet directly with the people who actually made the product, but even more interesting was the fact that the boss, the plant

manager, wasn't even present at the meeting. Not that the absence of the manager seemed to bother the customer. Furon employees were awarded the contract, and the order was increased by \$500,000.

Jim Belasco and Ralph Stayer share the belief that the critical difference in today's companies rests in the "intellectual capital" found in the people who make-up the entire organization. According to Dr. Belasco, "the organizations that will survive and ultimately thrive are the ones that can tap into the capabilities of all the employees, not just those few in leadership positions." And, in order for companies to benefit from the vast knowledge and know-how found within these individuals, company leaders need to involve these valuable people in the real business of making the organization run. Successful companies consist of employees who not only feel as though their jobs matter, but that they are significant, too. They want to know that their input and opinions are included and taken into consideration during day-to-day operations. In order for a company to successfully convince employees that transformation is in the air, they must begin their alteration process at the traditional top. In order for an organization to change, the leader has to change. Leaders must be willing to shed old management habits and allow employees to participate in the leadership process. In order to include employees in the company's decision-making process, managers need to:

- Stop answering questions and start asking them
- Stop making decisions for people and let them make their own
- Stop speaking first and instead speak last

It is only when employees are asked to stretch and grow that they fully function at their jobs and begin to play a vital and meaningful role in the strategic plan for the company's future. Because people, like buffalo, observe authors Belasco and Stayer, will follow as long as someone insists on leading. Unfortunately, along with such an aimless "tag-along" position, people don't bother to put forth their best work or show off their inherent creativity. Much of that spirited productivity and creative



energy is trampled by the herd and never seen by either the company or the company's customers. By letting employees lead, an organization will not only have the opportunity to realize its own highest goals, but it can help individuals reach and enjoy new levels of job satisfaction along with a real sense of pride and accomplishment.

Companies who have asked employees to lead have found that problem-solving is considerably easier and more innovative when people are involved in the process. They have quickly found that the people who actually do the job are the ones who know the best way to get the job done right. When the employees of the North Island Naval Depot in San Diego found themselves faced with the challenge of providing nose-to-tail inspection and repair on half of a U.S. Navy aircraft squadron in 60 days versus the normal repair turnaround time of four to five months, letting those on the job be involved in the process made all the difference. Because of the knowledge and innovation of mechanic crew leaders, flightline foremen, production controllers and others intricately involved in the repair procedure, they not only were able to meet what first seemed like an impossible deadline, but they beat it. Instead of an order being handed down from on high, people who actually knew how to make it happen were included in the process.


The notion that the manager must know everything and respond personally to every question and problem isn't relevant in today's organization. Not only can employees solve the problems at hand faster and easier, but once asked to be included in the process, they are proud to help provide their organization with the best solutions.

Critical to the effectiveness of learning to let employees lead is for managers to understand that simply turning over all the decision-making responsibilities to employees is not the complete answer. An owner of a retail shopping square who proclaimed his employees to be empowered and told them they were in charge of everything, not only missed taking the most

important step in the process, but threw his company into a complete state of chaos. He failed to provide his employees with the proper motivation to make good, responsible decisions. Instead of seeing their own personal responsibility to their customers, they short-sightedly used their newly-acquired freedom as a means to avoid responsibility. Instead of “delegating” responsibility, the owner “abdicated” responsibility. As Jim Belasco stresses, “The only way you can ever successfully run a business is if you manage that business from the customer in. And every single person in the organization needs to have line of sight to a customer.”

Those at Owens & Minor, the 2nd largest distributor of medical and surgical supplies in the country, believe that bringing their employees face-to-face with some of their real customers—specifically the patients at the UCLA Medical Center—made their employees become keenly aware of both the need and urgency of providing their products to the end user. After touring the hospital, employees readily admitted they were strongly affected by seeing a patient in a bed, particularly children in intensive care who were greatly dependent on the accessibility of products distributed by Owens & Minor. “Suddenly they were no longer cardboard boxes,” said Andre Clark about the supplies he pulls from the stacks at Owens & Minor’s warehouse located 20 miles away from the hospital. “I start thinking about the patients and I think, they need these supplies so I just do the best that I can and pull as fast I possibly can.” Not only did the personal connection between employee and customer increase sales and improve quality by 50% within Owens & Minor’s organization but it enhanced the Medical Center’s way of doing business as well. Because the Owens & Minor’s employees became aware of the Medical Center’s on-site needs, they were able to serve as both the distributor and in-house supply manager, replacing 300 vendors and saving the hospital three million dollars a year.

Successfully-run companies know that the most critical connection made in an organization must occur



between their employees and their customers. Rather than the head buffalo being the center of the organization, the customer must be. The head buffalo must stop being head buffalo and learn to let others lead. Once this occurs, not only do valued employees find true meaning in their work but the organizations they are a part of find themselves propelled to new standards of growth and excellence. Emerging as graceful geese from a clumsy herd of buffalo, they discover that they really can fly.

FOR PREVIEW ONLY
FOR PREVIEW ONLY

BEFORE VIEWING

Starting points—

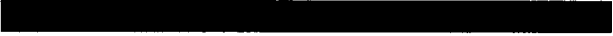
Designed to discuss context, for managers and supervisors:

1. How often do you seek input from the people you manage? When an individual offers an idea or a suggestion to you, what do you do with the information?
2. In what manner do you let employees know the part they play in reaching the goals of your organization?
3. When undertaking a specific task, in what ways do you help motivate the members of your department to work as a problem-solving team?
4. When there is a major challenge facing your organization, who is responsible for solving it?
5. What do you do to encourage those in your department to take a personal interest in their job responsibilities?
6. What kind of feedback, if any, do employees of your company get regarding the product or services your customers buy?
7. How many of your employees have actual contact with your customers?
8. Can you and the other employees in your department name the real needs of your customers? How much do you know about your customers' businesses? How often do you discuss the needs of your customers?
9. In department meetings, how much time do you devote to talking to employees and how much time do you spend listening?

AFTER VIEWING

Questions to help explore key concepts addressed in the program:

1. What is the first critical step an organization must take in order to make a change in the leadership process?
2. According to the authors, what important element of an organization provides the competitive advantage for survival and growth?
3. In what specific ways can a leader change his or her own behavior? When these changes occur, in what ways will it impact the rest of the organization?
4. What are some of the results and benefits realized by an organization when employees lead? What are some of the personal benefits individual employees will receive when they are part of this process?
5. In an organization where employees have been taught to lead, who is the central figure in the organization?
6. What are some of the immediate advantages of allowing problems to be solved at the level in which they occur? What are some of the long-term results of letting employees solve problems?
7. Based on the various organizations discussed in the program, discuss some of the ways in which employees showed true initiative. Why were the employees at the North Island Naval Depot so successful in meeting and beating the challenging deadline placed before them?
8. In what ways can a leader motivate employees to make good decisions? Why did the owner of the retail shops described in the program fail to empower his employees?
9. Why is it so important that feedback from the customer (or end user) reach each employee of a company? What made the employees of Owens & Minor begin to feel personally responsible for their customer?

- 
10. What does the term “taking ownership” mean when referring to the vested interest felt by an employee when he or she deals directly with a customer?
What positive results were achieved at the Furon Company when their employees took ownership?
 11. Why is a customer more successful at motivating an uninspired employee than an employer who takes on the same task?
 12. In the program, what important point regarding an organization’s focus was made in reference to the railroad business not realizing it was in the business of transportation ?
 13. In addition to a better product, what else do employees who lead provide for their customers?
What did the employees of Owens & Minor provide for the UCLA Medical Center?

FOR PREVIEW ONLY
FOR PREVIEW ONLY

COUNTERPOINT

Questions offering viewers the chance to discuss their different perspectives on the philosophy of letting employees lead:

1. In your opinion, how effective is your own current management style? Does it have any similarities to the style discussed in this program?
2. How do you think employees in your own department or organization would respond to a new style of leadership involving them? How long do you think it would take to get them to learn how “to fly?”
3. Initially, do you see any possible obstacles to such a program being implemented in your organization? What could you do to help your organization overcome them?
4. Are there any types of individuals in your company that you think might be reluctant to make changes in their leadership styles? If so, why?

MANAGERIAL SKILL BUILDING

For advanced audiences. These activities may be used to conduct small group/workshop sessions or as take-home assignments:

1. In light of the information presented in this program, can you think of what present problems your organization faces and how they might be solved by employees rather than management?
2. As a supervisor, can you think of ways in which letting employees lead might change your expectations about your own job? How might it change your company's expectations of you?
3. Under your company's current management style, how much personal pride do you think those under you take in their daily work? How much pride do you take in your own work?
4. In what specific ways might a personal connection between employees and key customers change your company's current relationships with those customers? In what ways could your company's employees help solve your customer's problems?



1359 BARCLAY BOULEVARD
BUFFALO GROVE, IL 60089
TEL 708.537.3100
FAX 708.537.3353
1.800.537.3130