



## EMERGING LEADERS:

### Why Taking Care of the “Next Gen” Takes Care of You



BY GARRETT J. SULLIVAN

As I approach the deadline for this article (February 2012), Warren Buffet has just announced that he is grooming his successor who will make a “seamless” transition into power. With nearly 78 million baby boomers in the United States nearing retirement, I wonder what will become of the companies they’re leaving behind. Are they all preparing like Mr. Buffet?

Will the next generation be ready to step into the shoes of their former leaders? It depends on the current leadership’s ability to train emerging leaders and invite them to the decision-making table. Do a quick scan of your staff and press a mental “fast forward” button. Now, envision them a year after you’ve departed. What you see is more of a reflection of you than it is of them.

In my opinion, leadership training is an often-overlooked investment in a company’s future. Consider the return on this investment. Last year, my daughter Susannah, a high school senior at the time, was invited to join the Center for Tomorrow’s Leaders, a program that focuses on developing the skills of emerging leaders. As Susannah progressed through the year, she shared with me the many ways she was being trained – as well as seeing first-hand examples of how to successfully lead others. I found that when she completed the yearlong program she had new confidence and abilities as an emerging leader.

How well are we, in the construction industry, preparing our own emerging leaders? Although our industry is presently in a downturn,

it will rebound. When it does, we will need a tremendous number of new, highly engaged leaders to replace the baby boomers. This new generation of leaders has been dubbed “the buster generation.”

What steps are you taking to ensure your emerging leaders are being recognized and developed? Does your organization have the deep “bench strength” it will need to compete in our risky, ever-evolving, competitive business?

Listed below is a five-step model to develop your own buster generation. It was developed by two highly regarded leadership researchers Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner. Why not take the up-and-coming leaders of your company under your wing and begin to model these behaviors for them?

#### **Model the Way:**

As the president or CEO of your company, you must be credible at all times. This means you are willing to take a stand based on the values that are your organization’s enduring beliefs. We all know that a great leader “says what he means and does what he says.” Great leaders bring people together around shared values and connect beliefs with action/practice.

#### **Inspire a Shared Vision:**

A great leader will always have a vision of where the organization is going. This is a unique image for the common good, which is compelled by and fueled by a true passion for the business and for high ethical standards. It is not “the boss’ vision” but “everyone’s vision.” Leaders forge unity of purpose by showing employees how

the company’s shared vision benefits everyone. Belief in the vision and enthusiasm for it are the sparks that ignite the flame of inspiration.

#### **Challenge the Process:**

Change is inevitable and leaders are change agents. You must keep changing. When you are through changing, you are through in business. Leaders learn from failure, confront the brutal facts, take risks and make tough decisions and by doing so, generate small wins. A strong leader sees things with new eyes and asks the question “what would it look like if...?”

#### **Enable Others to Act:**

Leaders build teams based on collaboration, trust and strong relationships. They make people feel strong and build capacity in everyone – not just certain people. A leader shares authority, discretion and information. They grow other leaders.

#### **Encourage the Heart:**

Leaders express appreciation and recognize contributions. They celebrate values and victories. Leaders sustain team members by providing descriptive and timely feedback. Stated differently, they supply the water for the marathon. Leaders recognize that celebrating people and achievement strengthens the spirit of the community.

Developing emerging leaders takes time, patience and a conscious effort. As the boomers are leaving, the busters are coming. Your company’s long-term success will depend on how well you demonstrate and cultivate your future leaders.

Gentlemen, start your busters! **BI**

*Garrett Sullivan is the president of Sullivan & Associates, Inc., a management consultancy focusing on the construction industry in Hawaii. Reach him at [GSullivan@SullivanHi.com](mailto:GSullivan@SullivanHi.com), [www.SullivanHi.com](http://www.SullivanHi.com), or (808) 478-2564.*