



Tired of Being a Lone Wolf Leader?

JOIN A PACK By Joel Leonard

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Leaders in maintenance carry an overwhelming load as they combine the weight of responsibility with a sincere desire to address critical challenges. Many in leadership face burnout or breakdown, feeling that they are alone in their struggle for survival in maintenance.

Having supported Maintenance and Engineering Sectors for the past eighteen years, I have had the opportunity to face many challenges. My greatest challenges have come from dealing with the emotional side of leadership. The school that I graduated from prepared me for the mental and physical dynamics of business, but I was unprepared for the emotional challenges inherent in leadership. The following are some of the emotional difficulties I have dealt with as a leader. My hope is that as you read them, you will connect with some of your own leadership emotions and find encouragement and practical applications on how to be a better leader.

CRITICISM

Every leader is going to be criticized. The philosopher Aristotle observed, "If you don't like criticism, do nothing, say nothing, be nothing." If you are convinced that your destiny is to do something - to make an impact in your role - then eventually you will be criticized.

For maintenance leaders, the most difficult aspect in dealing with criticism is that usually we cannot defend ourselves. When people criticize us, they can distort the facts.

"If you don't like criticism, do nothing, say nothing, be nothing." - Aristotle

When faced with criticism, we must ask ourselves, "Is this criticism legitimate?" I've had to answer this question more than once. Sometimes I've found that the particular criticism was legitimate and other times it was not.

Criticism can be constructive, and we must be mature enough to check ourselves for changes that need to be made. First, we must separate our emotions from the criticism before we can judge fairly. We can search our hearts and find wisdom concerning any complaint.

SELF-PITY

Self-pity is a result of two common habits: first, when we compare ourselves to others; and second, when we compete with others. When I start comparing or competing, I end up feeling discouraged because there are always those who are further along or better than I am in certain areas of life. Surely, there isn't a profession more proficient at comparing and competing than maintenance. The best cure for bitterness and unwillingness to forgive is taking the moral high ground to pray for your "competitors."

Most importantly, we need to realize that other department managers are not our competitors but our associates. Too often maintenance, operations, purchasing and other departments squabble over resources, engage in politics and forget that there are other businesses who would love to acquire our customers.

FEAR OF FAILURE

The fear of failure must be avoided if a leader desires to experience growth in his or her personal and professional life. Maintenance Leaders are commonly apprehensive about making a mistake. "What if I make this move and discover that it wasn't right?"

In my own life, I have learned to respond to this question by admitting that people have seen us do many things that didn't work. A leader making a mistake periodically isn't going to surprise anyone. Accept the fact that mistakes will be made. This will reduce a great deal of the fear that plagues your mind. After you make a mistake, just try again. It's not a question of if you fall but how high you bounce.

The most effective leaders are willing to risk failure to achieve success. What risk do you need to take right now?

FEAR OF REJECTION

A fear of rejection begins to plague us when we seek to draw our security from the crowd. As long as we seek to draw our security from our people, we are unable to lead them to the next level of progress.

Many fear that if they are not acting like the rest of the crowd, they will be rejected. What crowds are you afraid might reject you? For some, that crowd is their staff or management. Some maintenance leaders avoid doing something out of the ordinary to rise above the status quo because they fear the rejection of others.

Address your fears. Identify those areas that cripple or

paralyze you and tackle them. One of the best characteristics a person can develop to overcome fear is perspective. The ability to see people and issues in light of long term view will change your life and give you confidence in the presence of fear.

LONELINESS

The job of a leader will be lonely at times. Leading means you are out ahead of the crowd - and that is a lonely position. All presidents have experienced the loneliness that accompanies their job. The day that the Gulf War began, President Bush walked the gardens at the White House for hours, agonizing over the fact that his decision would cause the deaths of many people. Abraham Lincoln, feeling the weight of leadership he carried alone, would get up in the middle of the night and walk the streets of Washington.

When I teach at a Value Added Maintenance conference, one of my main objectives is to help build relationships between the attendees. Maintenance Managers often feel that there is no one out there to talk to. When the pressure hits and they make decisions without adequate support, they sometimes find those decisions can be fatal to their company. Simply building friendships with other maintenance managers alleviates some of the feelings of loneliness and the costly errors it causes.

A great method to cultivate this interaction and identify extensive business resources is to get involved in trade associations such as the Association for Facilities Engineering (AFE) www.afe.org, International Facility Management Association (IFMA) www.ifma.org, Society for Maintenance & Reliability Professionals (SMRP) www.smrp.org, Association for Energy Engineers (AEE) www.aeecenter.org and many others.

I highly encourage you not to just attend but to also serve as an officer. I know from personal experience the leadership skills and confidence developed by managing volunteer projects can facilitate your career advancement and increase connection to major industry resources.

I also encourage you to find past heroes in the maintenance arena and become their protégé. For the cost of a cup of coffee and an open ear, you may be able to receive wisdom that would cost thousands of dollars if you procured a consultant. There are quite a few retired professionals who still

attend AFE meetings and I try to glean as much from them as possible. I hope these suggestions help you much as this cathartic experience in writing this helped me. [Plant](#)

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