

Excellence. NO EXCUSES!

Excerpt:

**1ST-LINE
LEADERS:
1ST-ORDER
STRATEGIC
ASSET**

Tom Peters

29 May 2014

Best or Bust: **1st-Line Leadership** The Heart of EXCELLENCE

Is there a “secret” to productivity and employee satisfaction? Yes! The quality of your cadre of 1st-line managers.

How do I know 1st-line managers singly/collectively are major assets?

Simple: **Ask a general or an admiral about the importance of their cadres of sergeants or chief petty officers.**

“In great armies, the job of generals is to back up their sergeants.”—COL Tom Wilhelm, from Robert Kaplan, “The Man Who Would Be Khan,” the *Atlantic*

Are you clear that a 1st-line boss is a full-fledged

LEADER? (NEVER use any other term.)

Many take 1st-line bosses “seriously.” I urge you to take the cadre thereof **INSANELY** seriously.

“People leave managers not companies.” —Dave Wheeler*

(*Among others, Wheeler’s assertion re ... **1ST-LINE LEADERSHIP** ... is supported by Buckingham & Coffman’s masterwork, *First, Break All the Rules: What the World’s Greatest Managers Do Differently.*)

(If the regimental commander lost most of his 2nd lieutenants and 1st lieutenants and captains and majors,

it would be a tragedy. *If he*

lost his

sergeants it

would be a

catastrophe.

The Army and the Navy are fully aware that success on the battlefield is dependent to an overwhelming degree on its Sergeants and Chief Petty Officers. Does industry have the same awareness?) (FYI: I was in the U.S. Navy for four years. This is *not* speculation.)

*“In great
armies, the
job of
generals is to
back up their
sergeants.”*

—COL Tom Wilhelm (the *Atlantic* via Robert Kaplan)

10 Questions Concerning Your First-line Supervisors

1. Are you, Big Boss, a ... *formal student* ... of first-line supervisor behavioral excellence? (*Yes, this sort of thing can be formally studied.)
2. Do you absolutely understand and act upon the fact that the first-line boss is the ... **KEY LEADERSHIP ROLE** ... in the organization? Technical mastery is important—but secondary.
3. Does HR single out first-line supervisors individually and collectively for tracking purposes and special/“over the top” developmental attention?
4. Do you spend gobs and gobs (and then more and more gobs and gobs) of time ... *selecting* ... the first-line supervisors? Are your selection criteria consistent with the enormity of the impact that first-line bosses will subsequently have?
5. Do you have the ... **ABSOLUTE BEST TRAINING & CONTINUING DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS IN THE INDUSTRY** (or some subset thereof) ... for first-line supervisors?
6. Do you formally and rigorously ... **MENTOR** ... first-line supervisors?
7. Are you willing, pain notwithstanding, to ... leave a first-line supervisor slot open ... until you can fill the slot with somebody spectacular? (And are you willing to use some word like ... “*spectacular*” ... in judging applicants for the job?)
8. ***Is it possible that ... PROMOTION DECISIONS ... for first-line supervisors are as, or even more, important than promotion decisions for the likes of VP slots?*** (Hint: Yes.)
9. Do you consider and evaluate the quality of your ... *full set*/**CADRE** ... of first-line supervisors?
10. Are your first-line supervisors accorded the respect that the power of their position merits?

*Is there ONE
“secret” to
productivity and
employee
satisfaction?*

YES!

*The Quality of your
Full Cadre of ...
1st-line Leaders.*

Suggested addition to your Statement of Core Values:

“*We are obsessed with developing a cadre of first-line managers that is second to none—we understand that this cadre per se is arguably one of our top two or three most important ...*

‘*STRATEGIC ASSETS.*’”

*(In no way am I suggesting in this section that organizations are not “serious about” 1st-line leadership! I am suggesting, however, that most are **far far** from being as serious as they ought to be—given the enormous impact of the total cadre of 1st-line leadership “assets.”)*

Selecting That (**SUPERSTAR**) 1st-line Leader

Promotion Decisions: *“life
and death
decisions.”*

“A man should never be promoted to a managerial position if his vision focuses on people’s weaknesses rather than on their strengths.”

Source: Peter Drucker, *The Practice of Management*