

By Ben Graham

Nurturing Emerging Talent

Leadership is not about filling a position, but finding the appropriate leader who wants the responsibility.

Recently, I was invited by the Paperboard Packaging Council (PPC) to chair a new network of emerging leaders within the paperboard packaging industry. The purpose: to encourage and nurture our most promising new leaders.

At \$10 billion, paperboard packaging is a bigger and more complex industry than people realize. Being a relatively young

executive myself, the ups and downs of figuring out how to navigate it are still fresh in my mind.

This new role has given me time to reflect on what leadership really is, and has brought me back to the most basic principles. Although they remain simple, I think they're easy to miss.

Ask who wants to be a leader. Sometimes we assume everyone aspires to move up

through the ranks within an organization. Not necessarily true.

Every business needs people engaged, fulfilled and happy in all roles. And at Bell Incorporated I've started simply asking people what they truly want.

There's a proverb: "A volunteer is worth 20 pressed men." That's not to suggest that everyone who aspires to greater responsibility is

prepared to handle it — or that there aren't diamonds in the rough who need encouragement to expand their aspirations. But it's surprising how clear people can be about what they do — and don't — want, if somebody just asks them.

For the new PPC network, we polled member companies and asked industry consultants to help us identify emerging leaders. Beyond that, it's all voluntary. Our current 22 members are involved because they are personally motivated to put in the extra time their aspirations entail, and they understand the value of surrounding themselves with people who think similarly.

Virtual is nice; real is better. The new PPC leadership network is designed to be a place where people can (1) be sounding boards for each other, and (2) research and share the most current thinking on leadership. This sounds easy, but keep in mind we all compete on a daily basis, so this requires breaking down barriers face-to-face, at least until trust is established.

Getting people together in a room doesn't happen as often as it used to, and I believe



leaders need to be more willing to go “retro.” That means people have to travel sometimes. E-mail, message boards and all the other e-ways to create a community are part of the plan, too, but they don’t replace getting up close and personal.

Additionally, face-to-face leadership shows up-and-comers in your organization what leadership looks and feels like. Creating forums for leadership debate on business issues, inviting speakers or sharing case studies — all these things sharpen current leaders and help mold future leaders.

Make it somebody’s job.

The PPC made a conscious decision when it formed the new network and asked me to

lead it. Company or industry, somebody has to be formally assigned to step back from the day-to-day tasks and be empowered and accountable for measured programs to both identify and nurture the next leaders. Otherwise, with the daily press of business, the initiative may not become a business imperative. And for any business that wants to succeed in the long term, nurturing the next generation of leaders is imperative. **ISM**

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Web Resources

Want to know more about leadership? Check out the following links on the ISM Web site.

- Institute for Supply Management™ Satellite Seminar Series: Leadership Skills and Team Essentials for Supply Management
www.ism.ws/education/SatSemDetail.cfm?ItemNumber=5882
- Leadership Skills for Today and Tomorrow — Presented at ISM’s 90th Annual International Supply Management Conference
www.ism.ws/education/PastConfDetail.cfm?ItemNumber=6862
- Leading In, Out and Around — Presented at ISM’s 90th Annual International Supply Management Conference
www.ism.ws/education/PastConfDetail.cfm?ItemNumber=6842
- Which Way Did They Go? I’m Their Leader — Presented at ISM’s 87th Annual International Supply Management Conference
www.ism.ws/pubs/Proceedings/confproceedingsdetail.cfm?ItemNumber=728