Getting more of what you want and less of what you don't want

You Get What You Tolerate

In my nearly eleven years of facilitating CEO roundtables under the banner of TEC and Vistage there were some patterns that emerged again and again. One is critically important for leaders to be aware of.

Understand that the members of these roundtables acted as an advisory board for one another, trusted confidants with whom all topics were open and for whom direct and valuable feedback was always available. Often, a topic brought to the group centered on the behavior of a group member's direct report and how that behavior was somehow unacceptable. Sometimes it was about under-performing. Sometimes it was about disruptive behavior. The advice sought was usually some form of, "What do you think I should do?"

We nearly always had a wealth of "been there, done that" in the room, so there was rarely a shortage of opinions. Fortunately, our format for dealing with group member issues called for asking questions first, seeking to understand, before any comments were offered. That ensured that the presenter of an issue received the most valuable feedback.

In any relationship, if there is a problem, each party owns a piece of it. The pieces may not be of equal size or importance, but everyone has some responsibility. That's why I trained my group members to ask issue presenters this important question: "What is your part in this situation?"

That may seem to be an odd question, given the topic being a direct report's unacceptable behavior and it often elicited a deer-in-the-headlights look from the issue presenter. Still, the answer to this question is quite useful. What is most interesting is that every time the question was asked one of the answers was some variation of, "I tolerate that behavior."

The behavior you tolerate is always the behavior you get as a leader, so if you're getting behavior that is other than what you want, start with a self-assessment before any whining is attempted. You'll likely find what my CEO's consistently found and you'll probably know just what to do.

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