

## **Community can do more to solve perceived leader shortage**

October 23, 2006

Pensacola News Journal

By Mark OBrien

It's Monday, the start of a new workweek, and maybe your leadership skills need fine-tuning.

These tips, from Betsy Smith, actually apply to far more than the workplace.

We see leadership -- and the lack of leadership -- throughout our community, so Smith's suggestions apply to business and politics, sports and civic groups, families and individuals.

Smith is an executive coach, a new career she entered after retiring in 2005 from Pensacola Junior College, where she was an associate vice president.

As an executive coach, she helps people shape their careers and works with companies, showing troubled employees how to make improvements and guiding talented workers to maximize their ability.

It's fitting that No. 1 on her list of eight key elements of leadership is the "leader as coach."

The days of top-down leadership are waning, with more bosses willing to include employees in decisions "rather than be the know-all and be-all," she said.

They dare to "hire people to take their job," Smith said.

That's a radical change for turf-watchers who guard their jobs, so a "leader as coach" needs self-confidence.

Communication is second on her list.

Leaders must clearly say what they want to accomplish and how they will do it.

"It's hard to meet expectations when you don't know what the expectations are," Smith said.

Other areas of concern:

? Ethics: Do the employee's values match the employers?

? Vision: Can the boss articulate what he wants?

? Work/life balance: This issue is getting more attention as younger generations enter the work world.

They're less likely to make constant sacrifices for an employer because, in many cases, they saw their parents lose time, health and even families for their work.

A savvy boss realizes a balance of work and play will keep people fresh and focused on the most important issues in their lives.

? Development of new leaders: Is the boss a good role model? Does he offer training and professional development?

? Passion: A leader should show optimism and enthusiasm about his work.

Yet a leader doesn't have to be noisy. Some of the best leaders work behind the scenes and enjoy success without needing recognition.

? Strategic leadership: This requires a willingness to be unafraid in hiring employees and giving them chances to fail or succeed.

Smith also passed along a key attribute favored by former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani. He likes "ruthless preparation," and that's a valuable point.

Too often, an important moment arrives and the presumed leader either ad libs or wimps out.

One Smith idea especially makes sense: Older leaders can reach out to younger people and talk informally with them about leadership and explain how they progressed and what they learned.

Do it one-on-one, realizing that younger people often have careers and families that limit their options now, but that they can do more later.

Consider the time and conversation as investments in the community's future.

Start today.