

Definitely Mabey

Leadership and other G words

By Stephen Mabey, CA

This article originally appeared in the October 2012 edition of Canadian Lawyer.



We talk about leadership a lot! In fact lots of people talk about it a lot!

In talking about it so much we just may have built an impenetrable force field around it so lawyers and staff have stopped trying to live it because we have begun to think it is only reserved for those folks breathing air at the top of the mountain.

This abdication makes everyone dependent—not independent—and for many, has enabled them to be critical rather than constructive.

Well it is time to stop talking and start doing and every single one of you has what it takes to provide leadership to your firm, department, group, colleagues, community, etc.

For folks like me it is all about luck because without others' creativity I would likely be a green-eyeshade bean counter for somebody, somewhere—not that there is anything wrong with aspiring to that role (before I hear from accounting colleagues).

When I was trying to collect my thoughts into something bordering on organized and semi-intelligent, I went to one source I frequent with great regularity <http://www.ted.com/talks>—TED Talks. For those that have never visited the site, I highly recommend you do. If you let yourself be open to new ideas or different thinking, you will be absolutely amazed at what you can get out of the site on almost any aspect of business and personal life!

One five-minute talk by Drew Dudley on http://www.ted.com/talks/drew_dudley_everyday_leadership.html Everyday Leadership is clearly on point with what leadership should mean to each of us and how it is something that clearly us base-camp dwellers can exercise.

My choice of Dudley is not driven because of body shape, beard, or Mt. Allison University connection(!), but by the belief that each and every one can really lead whatever granular level you want—individual, group, department, office, firm, community etc.—to a higher plain.

I read somewhere along the way that “Leaders are the people who do the right things.” Even in the hectic world we live in, the extension of simple kindness and respect has always, and will always, be the most effective way of motivating people to go beyond what needs to be done.

As former U.S. president Ronald Reagan is attributed as having once said:

“The greatest leader is not the one who does the greatest things. The greatest leader is the one who gets the people to do the greatest things.”

For the second part of this month's column I want to talk about some “G” words that seem to have gone missing—not from our vocabularies but from our actions.

The words I am talking about include:

- gratitude
- graciousness
- gumption
- generosity

Staff and lawyers alike need to recapture an attitude of gratitude. We don't spend enough of our awake time being grateful for all we have! Many have fallen into the trap of focusing on what we don't have rather than what we do. Remember anger and jealousy, two emotions that cause you stress and lessens the quality of your life, cannot co-exist with an attitude of gratitude.

The best way to understand how graciousness has gone missing is to understand what graciousness is:

Definitely Mabey: Leadership and other G words

- Someone who is gracious would never seek to embarrass another person deliberately;
 - A gracious individual is quick to say “thank you” for even the smallest gesture;
 - Listening to the other person more than talking about yourself is being gracious;
 - Being gracious means knowing you are not indispensable and respect everyone's contribution;
 - A gracious person seeks out ways to make others feel comfortable and appreciated; and
 - To be gracious is to recognize the good in everyone and every situation as the first option rather than looking only for the conspiracy.
- The percentage of time spent chattering about people's failures rather than their successes;
 - The level of time lost not being grateful for one's compensation but begrudging others' theirs;
 - The amount of hours lost in a day spreading unfounded rumors and gossip about each other;
 - The lack of accountability/ownership for our own mistakes; and
 - The willingness to slack off when we think no one is looking.

When I speak of gumption I mean good, common sense and practical judgment, and the courage and determination to exercise it. Someone with gumption has the ability and sound judgment to decide what is best in a particular situation and to do it with determination. Gumption also denotes courage and the will to stand up and do what is right.

It is this latter aspect that is sorely missing in most firms today at all levels and why a negative but vocal minority has lessened many firms' culture.

I was torn about including generosity as one of the missing G words because of it being so intertwined with the first three, but upon reflection found it to be sufficiently different that I did include it. Generosity—as I would see it best defined as—is the “freedom from pettiness in both character and mind”.

This presence of pettiness has taken many different shapes in many different firms including:

Instead of defending your culture as something that is worthy of protection, if your staff and lawyers' deeds no longer reflect gratitude, graciousness, gumption, or generosity, then you might be best served by scrapping it and starting over.

Until the next column remember as Frank Howard Clark is attributed as having said,

"Real generosity is doing something nice for someone who will never find out."



Stephen Mabey, CA, Principal & Managing Director of Applied Strategies Inc., can be reached at smabey@appliedstrategies.ca.