

Responsible Leadership

Written by Robert C. Baldwin, CMRP, Editor
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Robert C. Baldwin, CMRP, Editor During a recent visit to the U.S. Postal Service's Maintenance Technical Support Center, I saw a copy of the "Leadership Principles of Colin Powell" framed and hanging on the wall. As I passed, I caught a glimpse of his first lesson: "Being responsible sometimes means pissing people off."

Intrigued, I Googled the title when I got home and found a PowerPoint presentation of Powell's principles on the Web and found out there is also a book by that title.

Three of the 18 principles, or lessons, have special relevance to maintenance managers searching for that silver bullet or special program that will solve their problem of doing more with fewer people and less money. Here they are.

Lesson 3: Don't be buffaloes by experts and elites. Experts often possess more data than judgment. Elites can become so inbred that they produce hemophiliacs who bleed to death as soon as they are nicked by the real world.

Powell notes that smaller organizations don't have the money to subsidize lofty elites so everyone on the payroll visibly produces and contributes to bottom-line results or they're history. But as they get bigger, they often forget who brought them to the dance: things like all-hands involvement, egalitarianism, informality, market intimacy, daring, risk, speed, agility.

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Lesson 4: Don't be afraid to challenge the pros, even in their own backyard.

Learn from the pros, observe them, seek them out as mentors and partners. But, Powell cautions, remember that even the pros may have leveled out in terms of their learning and skills. Sometimes even the pros can become complacent and lazy.

Lesson 11: Fit no stereotypes. Don't chase the latest management fads. The situation dictates which approach best accomplishes the team's mission.

Flitting from fad to fad creates team confusion, reduces the leader's credibility, and drains organizational coffers. Blindly following a particular fad, Powell says, generates rigidity in thought and action. Sometimes speed to market is more important than total quality. Sometimes an unapologetic directive is more appropriate than participatory discussion. Some situations require the leader to hover closely; others require long, loose leashes. Leaders honor their core values, but they are flexible in how they execute them. They understand that management techniques are not magic mantras but simply tools to be reached for at the right time.

Then, Powell lays it on with his definition of leadership.

Leadership is the art of accomplishing more than the science of management says is possible. **MT**

