

Sometimes You Just Have to Let People Shine

There is something I've learned over the years about people. Sometimes the person making the biggest difference in an organization isn't the person with the biggest title.

They aren't necessarily the commander, president, chairman, director, manager, or person standing at the front of the room.

Sometimes they're simply the person who knows how to connect with people. They communicate. They build relationships. They get people excited. They tell the story.

And somehow, without demanding attention, they become someone people want to be around.

That thought came to me recently while I was down at the Post. We had rented our facility to Copper Collective Market, and I had the opportunity to watch someone who, quite frankly, I think is a rock star at what she does.

Marketing? She's got it. Communication? She's got it. Building relationships? Absolutely. Getting people excited about what she's doing? Yep.

But there was something else that stood out to me. She wasn't trying to be the most important person in the room. She was simply trying to make what she was doing successful.

And that's where the lesson started for me.

People notice how we make them feel

We sometimes think leadership is about what we say. We think it's about giving instructions, making decisions, running meetings, or standing in front of people.

Those things can certainly be part of leadership. But there's another side of leadership that may be even more important.

How do people feel when they're around us?

Do they feel welcome? Do they feel heard? Do they feel like their ideas matter? Do they feel like they belong?

Or do they feel like they're walking into somebody else's organization and need permission to participate?

Think about the first time somebody walks through the doors of a VFW Post. Maybe they're a veteran looking for a place to belong. Maybe they're a family member. Maybe they're a young person looking for an opportunity to serve. Maybe they're a community member who simply wants to learn more about what we do.

That first interaction matters.

We can have the greatest programs in the world, but if someone doesn't feel welcome when they walk through the door, they may never come back. That's why people who understand communication and relationships are so valuable. They know that it's not always about what we are trying to say.

It's about whether people are actually hearing us.

Tell the story

One thing that really stood out to me was the ability to tell a story. That's important because people connect with stories.

Think about the VFW. We have an incredible story. We have generations of veterans who served their country. We have Posts that have been serving communities for decades.

We have scholarships, youth programs, legislative efforts, community service, assistance to veterans and families, and countless things happening every single day.

But here's the question: are we telling people about it? And more importantly, are we telling the story in a way that makes them want to be part of it?

There's a difference between saying, "We have a meeting Thursday night," and saying, "Come see what your local veterans are doing in this community."

One is information. The other is an invitation.

That's something every organization can learn from. We shouldn't just tell people what we do. We should help them understand why it matters.

Stop worrying about who's in charge

Sometimes organizations can become consumed with titles. Who's in charge? Who's responsible? Who gets to make the decision? Who's supposed to handle this? Who's supposed to handle that?

Those questions have their place. Organizations need structure. But if we're not careful, structure can become more important than the mission. And when that happens, we can accidentally push away some of the very people who could help us succeed.

Maybe there's somebody in your Post who is incredible at social media. Maybe somebody else is great at talking to people. Maybe another member knows how to organize an event. Someone else might be great at fundraising. Another person might be the one who can walk into a room full of strangers and make everybody feel comfortable.

Why wouldn't we use those talents?

We don't have to give somebody another title. We don't have to put another responsibility on their shoulders. Sometimes we simply need to say:

"You're really good at this. How can we help you?"

That question can change everything.

Recognize the people who are already making a difference

One of the easiest things we can forget to do is recognize people. Not with an award. Not necessarily with a certificate. Not with a position.

Sometimes the most meaningful recognition is simply telling someone:

“I see what you’re doing.”

Think about how powerful that can be. Someone may have been working behind the scenes for months. They may be making phone calls. Helping members. Posting information. Building relationships. Cleaning up after events. Welcoming new people. Solving problems nobody else sees.

And maybe they’ve never heard anybody say thank you.

A simple acknowledgment can give somebody the encouragement to keep going.

And that’s why this week’s Coffee Cup Challenge is simple. Look around. Find somebody who is making a difference. Then recognize them. Tell them you see what they’re doing.

And ask them: “How can we help?”

Not, “What can you do for us?” Not, “Can you take on another job?” But: “How can we help?”

There’s a difference. One takes. The other gives.

Give people room to shine

Maybe that’s the biggest lesson I took away from this experience. We don’t always have to be out front. Sometimes our job is to recognize the person who belongs out front. Sometimes our job is to create the environment where other people can succeed.

And sometimes our greatest contribution isn’t what we personally accomplish. It’s what we help somebody else accomplish.

That’s bigger than a title. That’s bigger than an organization. And that’s bigger than any one person.

Whether we’re talking about a VFW Post, a workplace, a family, a church, a nonprofit, or a community, the principle is the same.

Find the people who care. Find the people who communicate. Find the people who connect. Find the people who are already making things happen. Then encourage them. Support them. And give them room to shine.

Because sometimes the person who can help move an organization forward is already standing in the room. We just haven’t taken the time to notice.

So finish that coffee. Look around.

Who is your rock star?

And more importantly — have you told them?

Until next time — recognize, encourage, empower.

One Person. One Conversation. One Cup.

C O F F E E C U P F A M I L Y

Episode 11 Workbook

LET PEOPLE SHINE

Recognize. Encourage. Empower.

Name: _____

Date: _____

1. Look Around

Think about your Post, workplace, family, volunteer organization, or community.

Who is someone you know who consistently makes things happen?

Name: _____

What do they do that makes them stand out?

2. What Makes Them a “Rock Star”?

Check the qualities you see in this person.

- ☐ Communicates well
- ☐ Builds relationships
- ☐ Makes people feel welcome
- ☐ Encourages others
- ☐ Takes initiative
- ☐ Tells a good story
- ☐ Brings people together
- ☐ Solves problems
- ☐ Follows through
- ☐ Gets people excited
- ☐ Leads without needing a title
- ☐ Makes things better than they found them

What is their greatest strength?

3. How Do People Feel Around You?

Be honest with yourself. When people interact with me, do they generally feel:

- ☐ Welcome
- ☐ Heard
- ☐ Respected
- ☐ Encouraged
- ☐ Valued
- ☐ Comfortable sharing ideas
- ☐ Excited to participate

One area I could improve is:

One thing I already do well is:

4. Are We Telling the Story?

Think about an organization or group you're involved with.

What is something great that your organization is doing that more people should know about?

How could you tell that story in a way that makes someone want to get involved?

5. Recognition Challenge

Think of one person who deserves to hear:

“I see what you’re doing.”

Their name: _____

What specifically do you appreciate about them?

How will you recognize them this week?

- ☐ Call them
- ☐ Send a message
- ☐ Tell them in person
- ☐ Write them a note
- ☐ Publicly recognize them
- ☐ Other: _____

6. The “How Can We Help?” Question

Think about someone who has a talent that could benefit your organization.

What talent do they have?

How could that talent help your group?

What could you do to support them without simply giving them another job?

7. Personal Action Step

One person I will encourage this week:

One relationship I will strengthen:

One story I will help tell:

One thing I will do differently:

This Week's Coffee Cup Challenge

Find your rock star.

Look around your world. Find somebody who is already making a difference.

Don't ask them to take on another responsibility.

Don't give them another title.

Don't make it about yourself.

Simply recognize them. Tell them:

"I see what you're doing."

Then ask:

"How can we help?"

My Coffee Cup Challenge commitment:

Who I encouraged: _____

Date completed: _____

Final Reflection

Before you finish this workbook, answer one last question.

**Am I spending more time trying to be the person out front —
or helping create an environment where other people can shine?**

Remember

Sometimes the people making the biggest difference aren't the ones standing in front of the room.

Sometimes they're simply making things happen.

One Person. One Conversation. One Cup.