Love Leaves a Trail

One of the most difficult yet necessary responsibilities of a leader is providing proper correction to his team.

Confronting poor performance is not pleasant. Unfortunately, our training in healthy confrontation methods probably came at the hands of a leader who was also not trained to properly confront.

We aren't born with a genetic code to help us handle poor performance within our teams. Often the path of least resistance is the path most traveled.

I still remember Kenneth Blanchard and Spencer Johnson's book The One Minute Manager and highly recommend it to new managers.

Drawing from Blanchard: Create a system for performance improvement that is simple and effective:

- Praise in public; correct in private. (Why do so many leaders have this backward?)
- Surround a corrective statement with several positive statements. I've always tried to use the Whopper formula—bread, bread, meat, bread, bread; positive, positive, improve this, positive, positive.
- Coach back to goals.
- Use questions.

Consider this example:

Manager: What is our goal (or standard) for cleaning tables after a guest leaves our restaurant?

Team member: To bus a table within 90 seconds of a guest leaving the table. Manager: What do you see in the dining room?

Team member: A lot of messy tables.

Manager: What needs to happen for us to achieve our goal?

While this discussion may appear to be simplistic, the fact is, we need to have more simplistic discussions with our teams relative to goal achievement.

Maintaining standards is an important marker for goal achievement. Repeat the goals. Repeat expectations. Confront with questions.

I think we would all agree this exchange was confrontational, but it wasn't mean-spirited, humiliating or fault-finding.

The volume of the leader's voice will not change the team member's answers. Passive aggression won't bring us a step closer to the goal.

Confront the issue with two powerful questions: "What is our goal?" and "What needs to happen to achieve our goal?"

Effective leaders are tender with people but tough on standards. Their leading in love leaves a trail and never fails.

"Love suffers long and is kind; love envies not; love flaunts not itself and is not puffed up, does not behave itself improperly, seeks not its own, is not easily provoked, thinks no evil; rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things" (1 Cor. 13:4-7).