

Leadership Practices and Soccer

By Dave Wondra

As I write I am sitting in a very warm truck, waiting for my daughter Laura's soccer game to begin. As usual, we arrived 45 minutes early so that the players can stretch their muscles and put their bodies through the various moves and motions that will be required to play the game.

Laura has been playing soccer for many years, and she continues to work on the same basic movements that she started learning the first day she walked onto a soccer field. While on that first day she learned how to play soccer, it takes far more than intellectual understanding to be able to put this sort of knowledge into action. In this case, Laura made a commitment early on to stay in the practice of soccer, and to continue to learn through honing her skills. I would imagine that she will hold this commitment for many years to come.

When I consider leadership, a parallel come to mind – a commitment to a leadership practice is required to really learn leadership. There is a big difference between intellectually understanding how to lead (“I know”) and being able to gracefully and naturally put that knowledge into action (“I know and I can do”). In this western culture of ours, we like to believe that memorizing processes, and discovering short cuts and secrets are the way to go about learn. While this approach may work in some pursuits, I am clear it is not the path to becoming a masterful leader.

Rather, it's a matter of practicing leadership, over and over and over again. While being in the practice of leadership is repetitious, it takes more than mere repetition to become a masterful leader. For one thing, leaders must ensure that they continually reflect on the impact of their methods on the people they lead. This sort of regular self-reflection goes a long way toward ensuring that leadership skills are continually honed. One way to make a leadership practice a learning practice is to regularly ask one's self the following three questions:

- What worked well that I will do again next time?
- What should I stop doing or do less of, to improve my effectiveness next time?
- What should I start doing or do more of, to improve my effectiveness next time?

From time to time it may also be helpful to ask the people you lead the same three questions. I have always found that this kind of input adds much to my own learning, and often corrects wrong assumptions on my part.

A commitment to a leadership practice is one of the core values of masterful leaders. It is a commitment that will bear much fruit, far into the future.