

The Leader's Preventative Maintenance

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There is a preventative maintenance parallel between the role of a professional leader and a mechanic. Take the challenge. Get your hands dirty and get better business results through the good people who surround you.

We talk a lot about leadership from the balcony or the clock tower. While seeing the big picture is important for a leader, knowing what's really going on comes from talking with people. The best leaders know what they need to know by asking good thoughtful questions and listening.

While the Centers for Disease Control may disagree, shaking hands is a good starting point. Shake hands with employees, managers and supervisors beyond your inner circle of direct reports. Shake hands with your customers. Shake hands with suppliers, people in other departments and whoever else your people depend on to meet business commitments.

Back in the late 70s, Anheuser Busch dominated the domestic beer industry. I did my part to help out. Early in my career, I was one of a team of managers for the start-up of a large Anheuser Busch brewery. August Busch III was CEO of Anheuser Busch.

Mr. Busch showed up for the grand opening of our plant with his entourage from corporate headquarters. It was a big deal for the community and a big deal for all of us who had made it happen. Mr. Busch stopped by my office after the celebration. He introduced himself, shook my hand and looked me in the eye to thank me for my contributions to a successful start-up.

A handshake is a powerful leadership tool. Use it to bridge the gap between the top floor and the shop floor. Think of it as a preventative maintenance component of your role as a professional leader. There is power in a handshake and it is supercharged when accompanied by eye contact and sincere interest in the person attached to the other hand. Use it to connect, learn and build trust – persistently.

Like going to the gym to get in shape, handshaking will fall to the wayside if you don't build it regularly into your schedule. If you don't have time to connect with the people who are essential to your success, you may not have time to be successful.



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