

And Now For the Good News

By Jennifer Selby Long

In the last issue of *Traveling Light*, I had a little fun turning three bad leadership habits into the acronym B.A.D. We all fall into these bad habits at one point or another, in one form or another. What matters is to monitor your leadership style, note if you're starting to fall into one of the bad habits, and course-correct.

In this issue, although the acronym is a bit of a stretch, I've listed four good habits shared by the best leaders I happily count among my clients. It's every bit as important to monitor how you're doing with the good habits as it is to monitor how you're doing with the bad habits.

Naturally, the four good habits spell G.O.O.D.:

“**G**” is for Generosity. It's not as simple as just adopting a mindset, but many of the best leaders do have generosity as their starting point.

They look for ways to be generous with their people. While few leaders control every aspect of their employees' compensation, the best leaders figure out what they can control and leverage it liberally.

A first-time manager, for example, will have no influence over the size and general allocation of annual salary increases, but can search for company-sponsored perks or employee award programs within the company and use them to recognize good work.

Regardless of your level, look for ways in which you can be generous and try a few of them, then add a few more. Be generous with your time, praise, and appreciation. For these, you don't even need a company-approved budget.

Calibrate as you go. When generosity goes overboard, it can lead to a burnt-out leader who suddenly has nothing left to give, so be sure to be generous with yourself, too.

“**O**” is for Other-focused. I suppose I made that word up to fit into the acronym, but the habit is an important one. Great leaders are focused on others, on their needs, on balancing the differing (and sometime opposing) needs of all of the constituencies involved in a business. Weaker leaders are focused much more on themselves.

Much like generosity, this habit requires frequent calibrating. Particularly for the leader who is in the minority, it may need to be a nuanced balance.

For example, if the only woman in the room gives all of her attention to others, she might be seen as a great other-focused leader or she might be seen as more of a caregiver than a leader. If an introvert remains other-focused to the point of not speaking, he may be seen as a great other-focused leader, or he might be seen as a wallflower with little fight in him.

Read the room (or the voices or the tone of the email threads) as you focus on others, so that you can keep the other-focused orientation calibrated.

The second “**O**” is for Optimist. Nobody wants to follow a leader who’s taking them to a depressing destiny. Yet so many leaders were promoted into their positions in part because of their level-headed assessment of risk and return, along with the pragmatic skepticism that goes hand-in-hand with that skill set.

Yes, of course, keep your skills in level-headed assessment, but if you naturally lean in the direction of skepticism, doubt, and a more pessimistic outlook, be sure to temper this in your mindset and communication. People may respect the pessimistic leader, but they give their all to an optimistic one.

Finally, “**D**” stands for Decisive. The best leaders are decisive, setting direction and mobilizing resources to move in that direction. Of course, you can change direction, if necessary, but stalling on setting the direction, on making that decision and committing resources, is destructive (not the kind of “D” you want). Hope is not a plan. You must make the tough decisions, plan their execution, and go for it.

How are you doing in each of these G.O.O.D. habits?

Here’s my challenge to you this week: pick one habit and identify one thing you will do today to raise the bar for yourself in that area -- just one focused action you will take. A little daily improvement will add up to dramatic improvement over a month, a quarter, and then a year. Plant the seeds now to reap the harvest then. And let me know how it goes. I’d love to hear your success story.