

Leadership Style: GPS or Guided Tour?

At Christmas I became the proud recipient and owner of a GPS unit for the car. It is an amazing piece of technology, much appreciated by someone like me who is 'directionally dyslexic'. I've just never been able to get my head around terms like north, south, east, or west, and for that matter, left and right are relatively foreign words to me as well. Should I be required to give directions, I typically say 'this way' or 'that way', 'your way' or 'my way', all dependent, of course, on whether I'm the passenger or the driver.

Needless to say, having a GPS is very helpful, and I continue to be stunned at how precise and clever the unit is. In fact, I was so impressed that I recently took the unit with me to Houston, knowing that I'd be driving in a city where I always manage to get lost. And it worked quite well.

Regardless of my destination, I only needed to program the unit with my destination and she immediately went into 'accessing satellite' mode. As the actual map came into view, she began to 'speak' to me, and with confidence told me when and where to turn. If I missed a turn, she said, "Recalculating," and then continued to direct me via another route.

Actually, she's quite pleasant, never telling me to turn around or that I missed the proper turn. Yet, I have a few issues with her, and because of them I refer to her as 'the wench'. I suppose, the basic issue is she is just annoying - primarily because she's always right! The other issue is that she doesn't give a lot of warning before directing me to turn. This is especially annoying during rush hour, on a six-lane freeway, in the rain!

Being an independent thinking woman, despite my directional limitations, I end up arguing with 'the wench', carrying on a conversation, telling her that she really should give me more warning, she should pay closer attention to the actual traffic conditions, etc. After all, if the satellite can guide her to the destination, it seems reasonable to me that it ought to be able to observe the traffic conditions.

The reality is, that as pleasant as 'the wench' is, her leadership style leaves a great deal to be desired. True, she does lead me in the proper direction and gets me to my preferred destination. However, she really is a micromanager, always telling me what to do and when to do it.

By contrast, I realized that I much prefer the style of a well-informed tour guide who not only provides direction, but also points out places of interest and shares the stories that help make those places more memorable.

I know, you think I'm comparing apples and oranges. After all, 'the wench' is not meant to do anything other than help me get from point A to point B without getting lost. The reality is, she does that very well, and I am often grateful to have her along. Yet, the 'human factor' is not part of her 'calculations', and even though she is accurate and correct, she begins to annoy me very quickly. And so, I long for that human connection that a tour guide gives, complete with the stories behind the landmarks and places of interest.

Perhaps we need to think about our own leadership styles and realize that sometimes, in our need to provide appropriate and correct information, we forget the human connection. We suffer from 'tunnel vision' in helping our teams move from point A to point B, and we leave them little room for accepting responsibility, making decisions, or being accountable.

Technology is a wonderful thing, yet it cannot provide the emotional connection we need to interact, collaborate, coach, mentor, or teach others. It is a tool that should provide us with more time for making those connections, for sharing the stories that make the journey more memorable.

What kind of leadership style do you use most often? Do your team members feel you are micro managing? Do they yearn for more responsibility and accountability? What stories can you share along the way that will be helpful, provide guidance, learning, and a more memorable journey from point A to point B?

Aloha,