Leadership Spotlight

Relationship Leaders and the Leadership Notebook

Anytime an individual takes an active role in directing the course of a relationship and sets the objectives of that relationship, that individual inevitably becomes the “relationship leader.”

—Robin K. Dreeke

In today’s high-speed technical world, the thoughtful process of knowing your people and looking out for their welfare often can fall by the wayside. As a young officer in the Marine Corps, I learned that one of the main leadership principles is to “Know your people and look out for their welfare.” An excellent tool used for that purpose by the Marine Corps is the compilation of a leadership notebook. The exact content of the notebook is not formally defined, but officers generally are encouraged to keep such information as biographical data, emergency contact information, anniversary dates, children’s names, and other important events. Officers also can use this notebook as a repository for professional notes, as well as performance assessments of job-related skills. They then can refer to this information when conducting evaluations and counseling sessions and in establishing rapport and credibility with their troops. If officers use the notebook to its full potential, they will remember significant events in the lives of those in their charge and be well versed on the strengths and weaknesses of their troops. This notebook is easily adaptable for law enforcement leadership modalities, as well as numerous corporate entities.

A solid foundation to a leadership notebook involves formulating general topical headings, which can be further broken down into more specific categories of personal preference. Choosing unique categories provides a sense of ownership of the content, as well as uniqueness to the tool that will inherently make it more fitting to the individual using it. Some suggested topical headings for the leadership notebook include personal information, physical characteristics, family history and religion, health, education, employment and employment history, financial (past and present), family dynamics, residence, office, vehicle, appearance, behaviors, interests/hobbies, and personal traits. By using such topical headings, leaders will be well equipped to elicit the information necessary to best know their people and look out for their welfare.

Effective relationship leadership ultimately comes down to productive communication. Using the knowledge accumulated in the leadership notebook can produce leaders who know how to successfully communicate with those they lead on topics of greater interest. In turn, this can help transcend the art of relationship leadership into solid, formidable, and useful dimensions for leaders.

Special Agent Robin K. Dreeke, an adjunct faculty member of the Leadership Development Institute at the FBI Academy, prepared this Leadership Spotlight.