



turning managers into leaders

Merge's Monthly Mega Minute – March 2006

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Merge Gupta-Sunderji helps turn managers into leaders. Through engaging keynotes and facilitated workshops, she gives people specific and practical tools to achieve leadership and communication success. Contact her at www.mergespeaks.com or 403-605-4756

Commitment or compliance?

It was opening night at an upscale art gallery. Sequin-clad art collectors were nibbling on dainty hors d'oeuvres and sipping wine as they alternately extolled the virtues and criticized the lack of vision of the various artists on display. All in all, a very dignified and sedate event, except for the little six-year old girl whom you couldn't help but notice. Exquisitely outfitted in a blue satin dress complete with matching shoes, she was clearly bored with the un-childlike surroundings. Like most six-year-olds at a loss for entertainment, it didn't take her long to create her own. Running from pillar to pillar in the open-floor plan of the gallery proved to be great amusement. The high-browed guests look askance: a child, in the gallery, running around and making all this noise! The father quickly appeared. "Marie," he said, "please sit down." Marie complied, but only for a couple of minutes. Then she was up, racing around the room again. Her father repeated his request for her to sit down; in fact as the next 30 minutes wore on, he asked her several times. Marie didn't stop. Finally, in frustration, the father picked her up, and physically sat her down in a chair. "Now you stay here and don't move an inch," he ordered. She looked up at him and with a wide-eyed look, she replied, "Daddy, on the outside I'm sitting down, but on the inside, I'm still running around."

An innocent response from a child, yet it demonstrates an issue of great importance to leaders: the difference between compliance and commitment. Marie's father sought commitment, but all he got was compliance. Much like leaders who seek commitment but, unless they play close attention, may get only compliance. The difficulty arises because on the outside, commitment and compliance look the same. And usually, leaders don't discover which one they have until the crisis is upon them. One of the most successful ways to foster commitment is to bring your people into the planning process. Include them as soon as you can in matters



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that affect them; even better, let them lead the development of the issue. Then when the unexpected occurs, it's not just your, the leader's, problem, it's "our problem". Commitment is what you want, but it takes an investment of energy up front to get it.