



turning managers into leaders

Merge's Monthly Mega Minute – April 2013

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Merge Gupta-Sunderji turns 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

Are you using your tusks or your teeth?

On a recent engagement in India, the car I was traveling in was pulled over by a policeman for an alleged traffic infraction. After a tense argument in low voices, my driver turned on his heel, returned to our vehicle, and we continued on our way. “What happened?” I asked. In response, my driver quoted the following Hindi proverb:

Haathi ke do daant hothe he – ek khane ke liye, ek dikhane ke liye

Translation: elephants have two sets of teeth – one real set to eat with and a second set (tusks) to show off to others. In other words, the “teeth” or tusks that are the most visible and obvious do not have as much “bite” and usefulness as the teeth that are unseen. Turns out that the police officer showed his “tusks” – blustering and threatening to fine and even arrest our driver for several supposed violations. But our experienced driver was well aware of both the law and his rights (the real teeth) which were on his side, and so knew that the officer’s threats were largely empty ones.

Now in Hindi, the word for “tusks” and “teeth” is the same (*daant*), so the proverb makes more sense in Hindi than it does in English; nevertheless, I thought the message was compelling. As leaders, we are sometimes guilty of hiding behind our “tusks” that we acquire through our positions and titles – managers, team leaders, supervisors. But true leadership success comes from using our often invisible teeth – the credibility and respect we earn over time from our employees and peers because of investments we make continuously in people and relationships. So are you using your tusks or your teeth to get things done as a leader? Are there times when tusks are more appropriate or effective? Please share your ideas online on my blog at: www.mergespeaks.com/blog.

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