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Leaders, Check Your Attitude

By Steven L. Anderson, Ph.D., MBA

Recently, a client I have been working with for quite some time came to me frustrated. Last winter she felt completely in control of her life. She felt more self-confident than ever. Everything in her life and her business was working. But in the months since then she had somehow lost focus. Her confidence had slipped as had her results at work.

After discussing the situation with her for a while she realized how she had lost focus. She said that it had taken her months of hard work to become centered and confident most of the time. But once she had achieved self-confidence she had stopped focusing on doing the things that it took to get there in the first place. She figured that the matter was settled and that from then on she would be confident and centered. She realized that staying focused and confident, like staying in physical condition is a never ending job.

I then shared with her something that she found to be very helpful and I have decided to share it with you today. As you may know I am an instrument rated pilot. Under most conditions flying a plane in the clouds is not very difficult, but when a pilot is attempting to land his aircraft in instrument meteorological conditions, things can become quite challenging for the pilot. In fact, it is quite difficult to keep the airplane flying straight and level while the pilot manages the radio communications, and his progress on the approach to the airport.

In order to insure that pilots do not crash under these difficult circumstances, the Federal Aviation Administration has done studies to see how successful pilots keep the airplane and its occupants safe. They have discovered that successful pilots spend eighty five percent of their time looking at the attitude (NOT altitude!) indicator on the airplane's panel. The attitude indicator is a gauge that tells the pilot his aircraft's orientation in relation to the ground. As long as a pilot is aware of his attitude in relation to the ground, he will do everything else right and land the plane safely.

I think this lesson in flying is a good metaphor for leadership. A leader must constantly assess their “attitude indicator” in order to be effective. We can never become complacent about being centered as leaders. This work is never finished. It requires constant vigilance. If we are centered and have the right attitude toward all that is around us, whether we are pilots or leaders, we will consistently get the results we want.