

The Advisory Alliance

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Leadership: You know the "what". But do you know the "how"?

(An Interview with former Pepsi CPO Mike Feiner)

Leadership is very much like weight loss: Although people know "what" they should do, many don't know "how" to do what they should do. Visit any bookstore or Amazon, and you'll be overwhelmed by the avalanche of books on what leadership is, looks like, feels like, sounds like, etc. With any luck, we'll get to the two remaining senses before the decade's out. What's in shorter supply, though, is information on *how* to lead. This month, in a special 2-part 60-Second E-mail, The Advisory Alliance sits down with Mike Feiner, former Chief People Officer at Pepsi, and current professor of Management and Leadership at Columbia Business School. At a time when Pepsi's operations comprised 70,000 employees in 150 countries, Mike advised, coached and counseled executives on how to enhance their leadership effectiveness. He is credited with upgrading Pepsi's performance standards and organizational excellence, and is acknowledged as one of the key architects of Pepsi's distinctive culture, known for its openness, results orientation and assertive, "David vs. Goliath" style.

David Harper: Mike, you've recently written *The Feiner Points of Leadership: The 50 Basic Laws that Will Make People WANT to Perform Better for You*. Many books have been written about Leadership; why does the world need one more?

Mike Feiner: I've been immersed in organizational life for my entire career. What I've seen and continue to see is alarming. Far too many people find their work to be unsatisfying and demotivating. It's not just people in factories or call centers who feel unappreciated. It's not just first line supervisors who feel taken for granted. I find people at all levels, including senior management, feel undervalued. So this book is an effort to help aspiring leaders and seasoned managers alike make organizations more fulfilling. And to do that, books espousing leadership theories and concepts don't help. What's necessary is a book that shows people not **WHAT** to do to lead effectively--people know the **WHATs**. My former colleagues, my MBA students, and my clients all ask **HOW** to motivate and inspire and energize people. So "The Feiner Points of Leadership" provides very practical, hands-on and real world "laws" or recipes for dealing with the everyday problems of leadership.

Harper: Many people work cross-culturally. Based on your experience, are these "laws" universal? Do they apply in other countries where business cultures differ from that found in the US?

Feiner: Absolutely. During my career at Pepsi I had world-wide responsibility so I observed first-hand that these laws are applicable. What's key, however, is that the laws may be **APPLIED** differently based on cultural nuances/characteristics. For instance, even between the US and the UK, the Law of Feedback might be applied more indirectly and subtly in the UK. Another example is in Asia, where applying the Law of Intimacy, i.e., to lead your people you must know your people, needs be done carefully, as in the Asian culture people are more circumspect and private about their hopes, dreams and career aspirations.

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Harper: When you look at the volume of work and study done on Leadership, it's a bit surprising that there's not a general consensus of what makes an effective leader. There doesn't seem to be a generally accepted body of knowledge similar to what you find in other disciplines. Why is that so?

Feiner: I think that's because people conclude there's one model for the effective leader. My experience is just the opposite--high performing leaders come in all shapes and sizes. Some are short, some are tall. Some dress for success, some don't. Some are modest and self-effacing, some have huge egos. There is not one best style--so experts should stop looking to define it. What matters is the leadership practices that are followed--and these practices can be used in any number of ways.

Harper: What makes an effective leader?

Feiner: At the end of the day, leaders are expected to achieve results. And to achieve results, leaders need to build followership, i.e., to pull people and take people with them to achieve these results. Three things are required to build followership: First, leaders need to be competent so their people believe they know what their doing. Second, people need to feel that the leader is committed to them and to their needs. Third, people have to believe in the leader's character, which is all about the values the leader exemplifies.

Harper: You teach High Performance Leadership to graduate students at Columbia Business School. Many companies are also looking to teach leadership to their executives. Can leadership truly be taught?

Feiner: Great leaders are as rare as great artists or great composers or great athletes. Not everyone can be taught to be a Mozart or Michael Jordan. But everyone has leadership potential that can be enhanced by teaching the practices of HOW to deal with tough bosses and uncooperative colleagues and hard to motivate subordinates.

Harper: What must companies do to ensure an ample supply of top-quality leaders in their organizations?

Feiner: Start by presuming that they never can have enough of them. Then be passionate about finding the very best people available. Not good people, not very good people but the BEST people available. But that's just the start. Then the trick is to give them really challenging assignments so they're constantly challenged and stretched. And provide them with a variety of assignments that require them to face different business problems, different bosses, and different teams. And reward them, not just with money but with feedback and other examples that show they're wanted, needed and loved. If these things happen, your best people won't leave. And you build a cadre of stars.

Mike Feiner's book, *The Feiner Points of Leadership: The 50 Basic Laws that Will Make People WANT to Perform Better for You* is available at Amazon and all fine book stores - you'll just need to wade through the avalanche of "Weight Loss & Leadership" titles to get to it.

To learn more about Mike Feiner's insight and approach, please contact the Advisory Alliance at (912) 898-2255, or e-mail me personally at dharper@advisoryalliance.com.

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Next month, Mike Feiner discusses 3 key lessons about leadership, whistle-blowing, HR, and the retention of great leadership talent.

Until next month, best regards,

David

David Harper
Member and Directing Manager

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