

Summary:

This is the story of a youngish Fortune 500 Company Manager named Jeff Walters. Jeff is in a slump. He has work load issues, people issues, hiring issues, performance issues, and more. Playing golf one day, he sees Tony Pearce, a semi-retired business leader who now writes books and coaches top executives. Jeff had met Tony years ago through his Dad, and Tony had written him a note congratulating him on his graduation from college, noting that now the learning would really begin, wishing him success and offering to talk to him about personal and business issues. The note also said he would be honored to allow Jeff to learn from (Tony's) experiences.

Jeff called Tony and was elated that Tony remembered him. He asked Tony for help and Tony agreed as long as Jeff agreed to meet on eight successive Monday mornings and also as long as Jeff agreed to teach others the lessons he learned. They met each Monday for eight weeks and as Jeff discussed the problems he was having managing and leading his department, Tony offered some relevant lessons. He set some ground rules for the meetings; start and finish on time, tell the truth and try something different. He also gave Jeff some homework to do between sessions.

The eight topics Tony covered are listed in bold and his main points are captured below:

- Drivers and Passengers (there are both...be a driver)
- Until you accept total responsibility, no matter what, you will not be able to put plans in place to accomplish your goals.
- Transitioning from manager to leader requires that you make different decisions. Leading and managing are different.
- Keep the Main Thing the Main Thing (stay focused)
- People have different perceptions of what the main thing is (know your mission and make sure others do too).
- Escape from Management Land
- Get (and stay) in touch with your people.
- Your job is not to lower the bottom by adjusting to and accommodating the fallen stars. You should be raising the top by recognizing and rewarding superstar behavior.
- The "Do Right" Rule
- Develop your action plan before you get into a crisis. Anticipate potential problems, act to prevent them, and have contingencies.
- Guard your integrity like it's your most precious management possession.
- Hire Tough
- The most important asset in your company is having the right people on your team.
- Never lower your standards just to fill a position. You will pay for it later.
- Do Less or Work Faster
- Your time is your responsibility. Take control of your time so you can take control of your life.
- Look for small increments of time by prioritizing, limiting interruptions, and effectively managing meetings.
- Buckets and Dippers (Don't be a dipper and take from others)
- Fill lots of buckets by:
 - Knowing the main things
 - Giving feedback on performance
 - Providing recognition
 - Communicating the team score
- The more buckets you fill, the more your bucket is filled.
- Enter the Learning Zone
 - Get out of your comfort zone and live in the learning zone
- Read one management/leadership book a month (or at least the BVC Opinions!)
- Read at least 10 minutes a day
- Set goals / Stay positive / Give back

Opinions:

Good news- The book is well-written and very easy to read. It only has 100 pages! It has lots of relevant examples of what many of us face in managing and leading others every day. And it's one of those books that makes you say, "I have seen and heard these simple (but powerful) lessons before, but never this clearly," and makes me say, "Why didn't I write a book like this?"

Bad news- Like the recent Oprah Book Club saga, this could be construed as a true story, but it is not. I called the publisher and confirmed my guess that it is a compilation of "truish" stories and events that "sort of" occurred over the years. There is no Jeff or Tony, per se, but this does not take away from the book or the lessons at all. It is still really, really good!

Good news- As usual, I have reviewed the lessons for you and offer some meaningful applications.

Applications:

1. One of Tony's points, Keep the Main Thing the Main Thing, is very near and dear to me. The vast majority of the many teams I have helped over the years have missed on this one. Teams go through those Forming, Norming, Storming and Performing stages. The Norming stage is where a mission should be created, where SMART goals should be set, where roles should be defined, etc. Too many times, that stage is short circuited, or assumed and the team pays for it later. Take the time to define what the main thing is (your purpose, mission and objectives) and test and redefine it along the way; especially when you sense confusion, when a new team member joins, or when conditions change.

2. Keep Tony's other tips listed above as a handy reference.

We have all learned that prioritizing, limiting interruptions and managing meetings better will "save" us time, and we know that accepting responsibility, listening to our people, planning and taking time to develop ourselves are good ideas, but having them as constant reminders hanging on our wall, might be an even better idea.

And Finally:

I work with many clients on Decision Making, Communication, Team Building, Conflict, Executive Coaching and Organization Change issues and have already put aspects of this book to use with some of them. I intend to continue using what I learn about this topic with more clients in the future. If you want more thoughts about this book, or want to add your own, check out my blog. You can visit it at <http://richsteel.blogspot.com/> This opinion and others are posted on my web site: www.rsbc.com To talk more about this and other topics, e-mail me (Rich Steel) at rsbvc@aol.com or call me at my office on 610 388 3680 or on my cell at 610 324 8466.