Real Leaders Don't Watch Movies

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In this month's 60-Second Email™, why you should leave the popcorn at home, and don't watch at work.

"I'm king of the world!"
"Show me the money!"
"You can't handle the truth!"
"Greed, for lack of a better word, is good."
"Go ahead, make my day."

Memorable quotes from memorable films. Love 'em or hate 'em, movies of all types end up in our collective consciousness. In reviewing a list of movie quotes recently, I was impressed by how just one short phrase was all I needed to be reminded of an entire film. Such is the power of the movie experience.

I find it fascinating too how in a very short period of time, we go from knowing nothing about the subject of a film, to laughing, screaming, crying, and thinking about it. Typically in less than two hours. And regardless of the emotion, we continue to seek out the experience, again and again. (My kids can tell you about the favorite Dad position when watching a thriller or horror film - a blend of half watching / half avoiding. You want to see what's around the corner or in the closet, but then again, you really don't.)

I love watching movies (800+ Netflix rentals/downloads since 2003), and I especially enjoy watching movies with my family. There's something about going through the experience together that makes it that much more enjoyable.

However, I do tend to draw the line between family and work. I feel movies have a great place in the home, but shouldn't be used at work. And here's why.

The AdvisoryAlliance 60-Second Email™

As popular as it is to use them in leadership development and training programs, I have a real problem when people do so. As mentioned earlier, I love watching movies; I think they're a lot of fun. I just don't feel they're an effective tool for developing or educating leaders and managers. If it were that easy, all we'd have to do is sit people in front of the television 8 hours a day (many people do so anyway), and show them training videos.

Essentially, I think many people confuse inspiration with effectiveness.

I can be temporarily inspired or motivated by watching a leader in a film (e.g. George C. Scott as General Patton in "Patton", Kurt Russell as Herb Brooks [1980 USA winter Olympics hockey coach] in "Miracle", Robin Williams as John Keating in "Dead Poets Society", or Richard Dreyfuss as Glenn Holland in "Mr. Holland's Opus"), but am I really changed by the experience of watching the selected movie clip?

And more often than not, the context is not relevant: Will I be leading an entire army, Olympic hockey team, or classroom full of English or music students? Also, I can possibly see the value of using historical characters, but fictional characters? The latter do essentially what the screenwriter wrote them to do, and I have a difficult time relating to the leadership "truth" of that.

Instead of using movie clips in your next leadership or management development program, why not look within your own organization for some exceptional examples? Surely there's someone in your company who can share a story or two about what great leadership or management looks and, more importantly, feels like. And so what if they didn't conquer a nation or win a gold medal? By your own leaders' showing the blood in their veins about their struggles and challenges, your people will identify more with "one of their own" than with some famous actor (paid pretender) up on the screen.

And isn't that what you really want? Your people looking at someone they work with, someone they know, feeling that maybe one day, they too could be speaking to a class of emerging leaders, sharing their stories about what leadership truly means.

So when it comes to examples of great leadership, let Hollywood stay in Hollywood. Find some of your own internal stars, and make them the "celebrities" they deserve to be.

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Go ahead, make my day, and share your thoughts with other readers on our blog.

You can access all of our 60-Second Emails (TM), including the most recent issue, *Real Leadership Development: You Know It's Not Easy; It's a Struggle*, via this link.

Until next month,

David

David Harper, Managing Principal
dharper@advisoryalliance.com

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