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*president, Corporate Ink Public
Relations, LTD*



Igal Elyassi, DDS
owner, Wilshire Smile Studio



Ron Wince
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taking the lead

How innovative leadership can spell the difference between boom and doom for many small businesses.

Leadership and micro-business aren't often thought to go together. Given the crises that seem to pop up each week in small businesses—whether you're a plumber with one assistant or a baker with 19—the most pressing matters seem to lend themselves more to the immediacy of crisis management than to a deliberate, forward-thinking vision. In truth, you just have to know where to look for leadership opportunities—and there's no better place to start than among your employees, experts say.

BY SCOTT S. SMITH



case study #1

Amy Berar

president

CORPORATE INK PUBLIC
RELATIONS, LTD.

When Amy Bermar set up her Newton, Mass., technology PR firm, the former news reporter made the typical mistake of thinking that she had to perform everyone else's job in addition to her own. "We start out as independents, then we hire because we have too much work, but we tend to think we still have to do everything," she says. "I was too impatient to be a good manager, and I was getting irritated with how others were doing their work."

But good leadership, she says, demands that a businessperson know how to delegate. When she figured this out, Bermar began turning over more responsibilities to her staff, realizing that she didn't need to know every detail about every account that her company took on. "It's a team effort," she says. "As I recently heard at a seminar, if you're doing all the work, you're not leading the business."

Moreover, she says, all of the members of her staff are gaining valuable leadership experience by participating in the decision-making on critical issues and by setting goals for the company and themselves. "Leadership is not about always having the right answers," Bermar observes. "It's about finding a way to get them. By working together to work out solutions, no one feels imposed on with the result, and we share ownership of success."

Bermar, who had never run a PR firm before starting her own, has made up for her lack of experience by engaging in peer-to-peer mentoring through a CEO forum, The Commonwealth Institute in Boston.



BILL JOINER is co-author of *Leadership Agility: Five Levels of Mastery for Anticipating and Initiating Change*.

Joiner urges business leaders to evolve from experts who know a business but can't delegate to "catalysts." "According to our research, only 10 percent of business leaders continue into the 'catalyst' phase," he says. Catalysts "emphasize participation in decision-making, goal-setting and other critical issues, not just to get employees to buy in but to produce better decisions."

For four hours a month, she listens to six to 10 other women discuss their professional challenges. She views this as a major boost to her efforts to be a better leader. "I can get away from putting out fires and think strategically," says Bermar.

Her on-going leadership education has also taught Bermar to offer incentives to keep her best workers. In an industry fraught with high turnover, she's held onto many employees not just with better-than-average pay, bonuses, profit-sharing and four-week vacations—but also with a new sabbatical program.

"About four to six years is when there is the greatest risk of leaving, so we give them three weeks off in that period to do something completely unrelated to their work," says Bermar.

While a worker is gone, his or her colleagues learn to take on more tasks and hone their abilities. When the worker does come back, he or she returns rejuvenated and eager to contribute.

case study #2



Igal Elyassi, DDS

owner

WILSHIRE SMILE STUDIO

"If you want to grow a healthy business, you have to be a leader—and that means constantly upgrading your skills to be sure you're going in the right direction," observes Dr. Igal Elyassi, a general and cosmetic dentist in Hollywood.

To be sure he's guiding his practice and his small staff along the right path, Dr. Elyassi attends a range of seminars each year to gather new ideas and techniques that he often implements when he returns to work. Dr. Elyassi says some of his best cues

have come from workshops.

He's learned that "you need to have a vision of the destination for your perfect practice and then be sure that all the systems — finance, marketing, clinical, technology, organization, the people — are aligned in support of that goal."

Dr. Elyassi says honest, constructive communication is also key to getting a unified effort from his staff. So his staff meets once a week for an hour, with everyone focusing on what is being done well and where improvements need to be made. "It's one of the best things we do," he says. "We didn't have regular employee meetings in other offices I worked in."



RELLY NADLER, PSYD authored *Leaders' Playbook: How to Apply Emotional Intelligence — Keys to Good Leadership*.

"Great bosses have more influence with their employees, who will work harder and smarter to please them," says Nadler. "The top things any staff wants from the owner are appreciation for what they do; the opportunity to contribute value to the company; security from being laid off; a connection with others at work; clear expectations and the necessary resources to do their job well."

Leadership means getting out in front of the competition quickly. To help, the USPS offers **Express Mail®** service, the fastest way to send packages that need to be there in a hurry, at rates starting at \$14.40.

how can leaders keep good followers?

The cost of replacing an employee can range from 70 percent to 200 percent of his or her annual salary. Beverly Kaye, president of Beverly Kaye & Associates of Los Angeles, is co-author of *Love 'Em or Lose 'Em*, the world's best-selling employee retention handbook. She says most business owners and managers mistakenly believe that people stay with their companies primarily for the money.

But in truth, she says, the majority of employees are most interested in exciting and challenging work. After this, they most value career growth and learning on the job. Working with great people places third. Then comes fair pay.

So what can a small business owner do to improve the odds that good employees will stay?

- **Thank people** — in writing. Many workers have been known to keep a letter of praise throughout their careers.
- **Get to know employees** on a personal level and let them know you.
- **Be a role model** that is real: point out how you've coped with difficulties and don't pretend to be perfect.
- **Reward failure** when the employee gave it every effort or took a sensible risk.
- **Nurture creativity.**
- **Give more feedback** on work quality—and allow employees to critique the boss.
- **Rotate assignments** and combine tasks.
- **Empower the staff** to organize their schedules and choose the methods for meeting goals.

For more ideas about creative ways to cost-effectively reward good performance, consult Bob Nelson's classic 1001 Ways to Reward Employees.



Dr. Elyassi asks employees to think of him as a co-worker rather than as the boss and reminds them constantly that they are all there to serve the patient—Dr. Elyassi included. “We’re treating human beings here, not teeth,” he says.

But finding people who can meet his needs isn't easy, Dr. Elyassi says, so he often turns to employees for referrals when seeking a new hire. He also uses contacts in his dental fraternity and among professors at his alma mater.

New hires go through three months of probation, where Dr. Elyassi and others train and observe the new worker, noting how he or she interacts with other team members and patients, before offering permanent employment. There is intensive training and observation of how the new worker interacts with the other team members and with the patients before the final offer of permanent employment is made.

When patients leave our office, he says, “we want them to be wearing a smile — and a better one!”

case study #3

Ron Wince

Chief Executive Officer

GUIDON PERFORMANCE SOLUTIONS, LLC.

Allowing your workers to talk about books on company time may strike some entrepreneurs as



wasteful—but for Ron Wince, it's leadership.

The head of Guidon Performance Solutions, a business consultancy based in Mesa, Ariz., Wince not only encourages his employees to talk about books, he assigns them books and then sets aside time at work for them to discuss their reading.

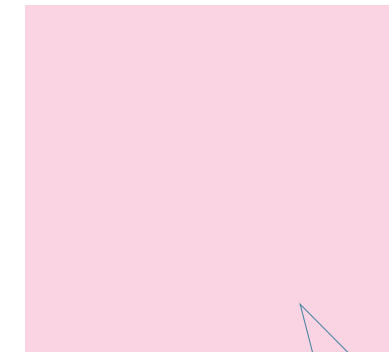
Once a month for three months, no matter where they are in the world, Guidon's employees teleconference or use WebEx to discuss a couple of chapters from a chosen book for up to an hour on company time.

“We invest a significant amount of our non-billable time in training and development, and this is a cost-effective way,” he explains. “There are many intangibles out of this approach—cultural and team building. Everyone understands the critical thinking needed to participate in analytic thinking.”

The books cover a range of issues—from the nuts-and-bolts of business to motivation to problem-solving—and workers have already gleaned some valuable lessons from their reading. As an example, Wince cites a book entitled *Crucial Conversations*, which explains how to facilitate communication. He points out that the book provides coaching skills for important conversations at home, especially for parents with teens. Wince says that urging his employees to read books like this sends the message that they are valued as human beings, not just as workers.

“Business leaders need to address the whole person,” says the CEO. “If someone has had a tough night, the effects will come to work with them.”

Wince has also assigned *The Antidote: How to Transform Your Business for the Extreme Challenges of the 21st Century*, by consultant Anand Sharma, and *Primal Leadership: Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence* by Annie McKee, Daniel Goleman and Richard Boyatzis.



LEE FROSCHEIER is co-author of *Vital Factors: The Secret to Transforming Your Business and Your Life*.

“Good consultants become a source of new ideas for clients, and Wince supports this by fostering continued learning through reading business books,” Froscsheier says. “Select books that contain principles and concepts designed to enhance business. Some organizations have allowed new books to turn their business into a cafeteria of strategies with an ever-changing menu. Business owners should sponsor books that complement the strategy and direction of their company.”

“It's very rewarding,” says Wince, “to see a consultant begin to leverage a communications approach or leadership they learned from (one of the assigned books), and move up the learning curve as they mature. You can also coach them on missed opportunities to leverage something we might have studied.”

Wince plans to make the autobiography of GE CEO Jack Welch, *Jack: Straight from the Gut*, the next assigned book. Wince says that Welch was successful because he showed how to instill behaviors in people so that on a daily basis they would act to benefit the organization—to be collaborative, have integrity, be positive, and so forth.

“When the boss is around, people tend to be on their best behavior, but you want that all the time,” Wince explains. “Business owners are kept up at night thinking about what happens when they aren't there.”

how usps can help



Good leadership means maximizing your opportunities to save resources and delegate responsibilities. The US Postal Service® has solutions that are designed to help small business leaders meet these goals and others.

CLICK-n-SHIP®, for example, is a convenient software program that allows you to print shipping labels right from your own computer. No more hunting around for the right labels.

And you don't have to sacrifice peace of mind for expedience with this service: You can purchase USPS insurance for Click-N-Ship® and add it to Priority Mail® and Express Mail® packages.

And since good leaders know how to farm out duties, save yourself the effort of lugging packages to a Post Office™ by relying on USPS Carrier Pickup™. Your postal carrier will pick up your packages at your address, at no cost. Carrier Pickup is available for Overnight Guaranteed, 2-3 Day and International packages. And you can send as many packages as necessary.

USPS also makes it just as convenient for you to obtain shipping supplies online. Just visit the Web site at usps.com to order a variety of supplies, including stamps, boxes and envelopes. We also offer books, artwork and selection of entertaining CDs and DVDs. All will be delivered directly to your mailbox.