



## Transformational Leadership & Service Podcast

### Episode 6 Transcript

#### *Developing Top Bananas*

"Sarah, how was your day?" I asked, after my daughter's first day in kindergarten.

"Great!" she replied with enthusiasm. "I'm the top banana."

"Really?" I asked with a chuckle. "What does that mean?"

My daughter quickly explained that her teacher had given each student construction paper bananas with their names printed on them. One by one each had been asked to stand and count as high as they could. When the activity was finished, all the bananas were taped, at their appropriate heights, on the paper "banana tree" located on the classroom wall. Sarah's success at counting had earned her the designation as the day's "top banana."

Proud of her accomplishment, I asked, "How long do you expect to be the top banana?" Her reply was unforgettable.

"Forever!" she stated confidently, as she walked away.

What does it mean? We recognize that for my daughter and her young classmates, those early educational lessons will serve as the foundation on which future academic performance and psychological success will be built. Wise teachers use imagination and creativity to establish mechanisms which determine the individual abilities of each student, while challenging each student to achieve even more.

How does this apply at work? Business leaders recognize the importance of finding the right employees for their available positions. Most do whatever is necessary to locate and secure the services of such employees. But, what happens after the "right person" is found and hired? Too often, that person is given the obligatory office/plant tour, introduced to co-workers, shown the break room and restroom, and then all but forgotten by management. Forgotten that is, until some situation arises which calls for the employee to rise to the occasion for the good of the organization. Too often, by then it's too late. The window of positive orientation opportunity has passed.

I believe the most important period for new employees is their first six months on the job. During that critical period, attitudes, work skills and habits – good and bad – are created and often unalterably established. Usually these professional behaviors are derived from the employee's environment. Therefore, leaders need to

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work to create more positive work environments. Here are three keys to doing just that.

**Imprinting.** Young ducklings mimic the first things they see. Leaders should know that employees may do the same. Leaders should manage the imprinting period by helping employees clearly understand organizational history and culture, professional expectations and even predictable workplace frustrations and pitfalls.

**Modeling.** Every organization needs recognizable heroes. These heroes and what they stand for should be both nurtured and actively publicized in hopes of planting the seeds for a future crop of organizational heroes. Heroic characteristics should include issues such as exemplary performance, perseverance, risk taking and a penchant for quality performance and service.

**Socialization.** One of the greatest human fears is that of being rejected by or isolated from our peers. Progressive leaders do everything within their power to create environments in which employees not only enjoy working together, but also being together. Inclusiveness, group involvement and shared experiences are at the very core of successful socialization efforts.

Are these “soft skills” really that important, some might wonder. Consider this. Would you rather have a department of “top bananas” or a department that simply “drives you bananas?” The decision is yours.