

ARE YOU THE LEAD DOG?

By Marilyn Thiet

As the manager of a team, where do you see yourself? Are you the lead dog pictured above? Are you setting the pace, running and pulling as fast and as hard as you can to get your team to follow and keep up? Or are you the coach (musher) pictured above, setting the strategy for the course you will take and then allowing your top performers to set the pace? Are you telling your team what to do or empowering them by providing gentle guidance? Most of the time when I pose this question to a group of new managers they feel they need to be the lead dog, the one with all of the answers, the one who has to show the others how to do it. Effective leadership and coaching however, more closely resembles the role of the musher above. A great leader coaches and brings out the best in each person on the team, driving the performance of the team by devoting their time and energy in individual and team development rather than in setting the pace and “pulling” the team along.

If you feel you more closely resemble the lead dog evaluate the following: Do you have the right people on your team, are they self motivated top performers who will set the pace? Do you allow you team to run and achieve their goals, or are you constantly managing them, telling them what to do and getting in their way?

This weekend will mark the start of the 2013 Iditarod. This is a grueling dog sled race that runs from Anchorage to Nome Alaska each year. In studying past winners, we know that the winning musher will be the one that:

- Sets the course, develops the plan and communicates it often
- Knows the terrain
- Ensures that the team has the capacity, capability and training to win
- Insists on a pace that will allow the team to win and holds the team to it
- Is prepared to let go of the slowest dogs that are holding the team back
- Will elude confidence, grace, and a quiet guiding presence.

What about you and your team? Are you prepared to win the race you are currently in? As the leader, if you are playing the role of lead dog more often than the role of the musher, the answer is most likely no.