

WHAT MAKES YOU A LEADER?

By Marilyn Thiet

What is it that enables you to call yourself a leader? It is not your title or the job you hold within your company. A title does not make anyone a leader. Those of us who have been in our careers long enough inevitably have experienced working for a manager who is not a good leader. Poor communication, a lack of self-awareness, inability to make a decision, lack of vision are characteristics too many of us have seen in people with managerial titles. Yet, in most cases these individuals would describe themselves as leaders and believe it, just because their title tells them so.

The most respected leaders are those who earn that title by what they do instead of who they are or the title they hold. The recent tragedy at the Boston Marathon illustrated to me how quickly leaders can emerge, and how easy great ones are to identify. Being on a long overdue family vacation during the week of the bombings left me less connected to the outside world. But in the brief updates I was able to see via the internet, I was able to quickly spot the leaders. Those people whose selfless actions, coupled with the ability to create a vision and plan for what needed to be done, communicate it quickly, and get others to follow were true leaders. Some of these people had a title that made them more likely to be a leader in this situation, be it police officer, race leader, or medic. But as I watched the news clips I observed some with titles paralyzed with indecision and inability to move forward, and then saw examples of people who were nothing more than mere spectators take charge and step up as leaders. People like Carlos Arrendondo, dubbed the Cowboy Hero for the white cowboy hat he was wearing that was quite visible in much of the video footage when terror struck. Carlos took charge, moved into the areas closest to the explosions instead of running away, communicated with the injured as well as directing those who were there to help. No one told this man "you are in charge here". He saw what needed to be done and did it. I've seen Presidents of corporations less inclined to jump in and get their hands "dirty" or set and communicate a direction to be followed.

So what is it that makes you a leader? Is it your title or is it your actions? If one was to just catch a glimpse of video footage on how you spend your day what would they see? Why do your employees follow you, or do they? If you were stripped of your title tomorrow would you still be a leader? As John Maxwell indicates in his book *The Right to Lead*, "No one can be given the right to lead. The right to lead can only be earned". What are you doing on a daily basis to earn the right to lead? How would your team answer this question? Great leaders actions speak louder than their titles.