

AFTER THE LOOK IN THE MIRROR

By Marilyn Thiet

I've written several times about the importance of leaders taking time to look in the mirror and reflect upon what they see, what kind of leader they are, and how they think others are seeing or perceiving them. I've also discussed the importance of seeking feedback from others to clarify those perceptions. While I still agree these are critical things for leaders to do, it is really just the first step to improving one's leadership. The second and most critical step is to act upon what was learned through this reflection.

Achieve Global recently released the results of their new global study of leaders in a report titled "Developing the 21st Century Leader". In this report they discuss six zones of leadership; Reflection, Society, Diversity, Ingenuity, People, and Business. When defining the zone of Reflection, they talk about the importance of looking in the mirror, characterizing it as "reflect upon your own performance" and "examine your role in the challenges you face". And they take it further, talking about what must be done after you reflect; "treat failure as a chance to grow and learn" and most importantly "take responsibility for your own mistakes".

Taking responsibility for our mistakes can be difficult to do. We fear that those who work for us will lose trust in us if we admit we have made a mistake. Instead many leaders try to shift the blame to either external factors such as the beaten horse of the economy or on someone else's poor execution internally. What they don't seem to understand is that people will actually trust and respect them more if they admit when they have made a wrong decision, especially if that admission is made freely and quickly.

As a staunch Milwaukee Brewers fan, I watched in dismay last week as MVP Ryan Braun, suspended from play for the use of performance enhancing drugs admitted he had made "past mistakes" and asked fans for forgiveness. For me, from what I know so far, it was too little, too late. Had he made such an admission a year ago when the allegations first surfaced my guess is that he would have been given more forgiveness and fans whose faith in him was shaken, most likely could find their way to trust and respect him again. But he not only make the mistake in judgment and used PEDs, but then to deny it publicly for over a year before being seemingly painted into a corner of admission will make it difficult for many fans, including me to trust and respect this talented athlete again.

True leaders are the first to point out their mistakes, not the last after everyone else has already discovered it. Leaders admit the mistake, outline a plan to overcome the mistake, correct the situation, and develop strategies to make sure that kind of mistake is not made again. They treat failure as a chance to grow and learn. We haven't heard the end of the Ryan Braun story yet, as a matter of fact there is a lot of the story that we

haven't heard at all. His next moves will be critical for his career, the respect of his fans, and quite possibly his self respect as well.

What about the mistakes that you have made as a leader? Have you been as timely and genuine as possible in admitting and learning from those mistakes? Have you been able to do so in a way that maintains the trust and respect of your team? What have you learned from not only those mistakes, but also from your admission or denial of such? And most importantly what are you doing differently today and tomorrow because of that? Keep looking in the mirror, but don't forget the most important next step, acting upon what you see.