

Mission Ready

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See For Yourself

Today's managers are often frustrated by the very technology that was supposed to make their business lives easier. Laptops for online reporting, intranet communications, and video conferencing, all seem to tie us to our desks more than ever. It seems increasingly difficult to schedule quality "face time" with our customers. We must often rely on those who report to us - from Sales, or Customer Service, or Project Management, or Delivery - who actually have personal contact with the customer, to tell us how things are going. When the senior execs we report to want customer updates, we sometimes have no other recourse than to pass on second and third hand reports, of which we have no direct knowledge. And, when our CEO wants to meet the customer personally, it can be embarrassingly evident, during the handshakes and introductions, that we have not cultivated the rapport with the customer expected of us.

In this newsletter series, we often refer to the U.S. Marine Corps as a practical business leadership model. One of the most striking characteristics of Marine leaders - from Generals to Sergeants - is their insistence upon seeing situations with their own eyes. One might think, with modern space age surveillance technology, it would not be necessary for a General to climb into a helicopter and ask to be taken, often at great personal risk, over the battlefield terrain - espe-

cially when one considers that the reports at his disposal have also come from Marine reconnaissance experts. Even with all this highly credible information, the General wants to see for himself. And, more often than not, something he *does* see will trigger memories from an action that may have taken place years or decades ago, allowing him to bring his considerable battlefield experience to bear upon the immediate situation.

As managers, we must remember that we cannot lead effectively from behind a desk - no matter how compelling the reasons are for being there. No matter how well equipped, the office is not where the action is. Frequent visits to the customer (or to the project site, or perhaps to the customer's customer) are necessary if we are to really appreciate the relationship that exists between our company, and those in the marketplace whom we serve. It is very important, however, that our visit is not interpreted - by the customer or by our own rank and file - as a lack of confidence in those who are closest to the task. As managers, we are there to help our people, not to ostentatiously take command.

Seeing for oneself *used* to be the way managers managed - before all those wonderful business tools took us away from the customer.