

Committing to the Commitment

by John C. Maxwell

At the age of 67, Thomas Edison watched as fire destroyed much of his work and equipment. Time to retire? Time to hang up the lab coat?

No way.

"All our mistakes are burned up," the inventor said. "Now we can start anew."

There is a time to retire, but Edison knew his time hadn't come. The fire that consumed his work didn't destroy the fire that burned within him to continue his work. Edison's commitment remained.

People tend to associate commitment with emotions. If they feel the right way, then they can follow through on their commitments. But true commitment doesn't work that way. Commitment is not an emotion; it's a character quality that enables us to reach our goals.

Emotions go up and down all the time, but commitment must remain rock solid. A solid team - whether it's in business, sports, marriage or a volunteer organization - must have team players who are solidly committed to the team.

Let's look at four things every team player needs to know about being committed:

1. Commitment is usually discovered in the midst of adversity.

You never know the level of your commitment or that of a team player until things get tough. Every one of us could stay committed to a marriage if everything was always good. Every one of us could stay committed to good health as long as we were healthy. The trick is to stay committed to the commitment when the economy takes a turn for the worse or when you lose your biggest account or when your plant burns to the ground.

Commitment, because it is a character trait, is revealed, not built, by adversity.

2. Commitment does not depend on gifts and abilities.

Commitment and talent, I have found, are unconnected. Many very talented people lack commitment. Many people who lack skills and talent are tremendously committed. So if you find somebody who's extremely talented, there is no guarantee that there is a high level of commitment.

For this reason, it becomes a great day when we connect talent with commitment - for ourselves and for those on the teams we lead. The moment that happens, the team goes to a whole new level.

3. Commitment results from choices, not conditions.

In writing about choices, Frederic Flach notes that most people look back on their lives and point to a specific time and place that marks a significant life change. "Whether by accident or design," Flach writes, "there are the moments when, because of a readiness within us and a collaboration with events occurring around us, we are forced to seriously reappraise ourselves and the conditions under which we live and to make certain choices that will affect the rest of our lives."

Our commitment springs from those choices.

4. Commitment lasts when it is based on values.

Establishing commitment from a team is a critical piece of leadership, but leaders I work with are equally concerned about sustaining that commitment.

I've found the only way to sustain commitment is to link it with the personal values of an individual. Once your commitment is based on your values, you have no problem sustaining it. Values are what drive your choices; they transcend your talents and skills and they stand up under the tests of adversity.

Commitment based on something other than solid values usually is a house of cards; when the wind kicks up, the house comes down.

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