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Smart Ideas

Problem Solving

ADMIT YOUR MISTAKES

How humility can help you get ahead

BY MARK SCOTT

Howard Wander likes to joke about his wife's claim that he makes at least one wrong move every single day. He doesn't question her opinion, and in fact, he is comfortable adding that his partners on the management committee at Fort Lauderdale-based Kelley Kronenberg feel the same way about him.

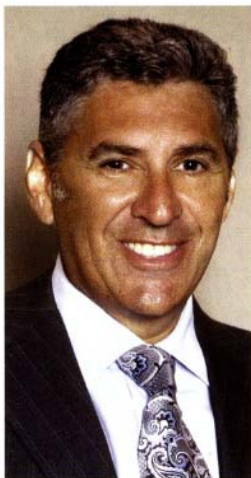
"I think that's a sign of strength to be able to say that you're wrong and admit that you're wrong," says Wander, one of the managing partners at the 140-employee law firm. "That's a key essential to leadership. Nobody is right all the time."

But it takes more than humility to succeed in today's business world. Wander credits his ability to work with his management team and work through their collective mistakes for the firm's growth over the years from two offices and seven lawyers to eight offices and more than 50 lawyers.

"Part of it is questioning each other," Wander says. "We are all different, and we come from different backgrounds, and we approach things differently. But we have a shared vision of our future. Sometimes we think it's a different road to get where we want to be and we don't always agree on that, but we have that shared vision of what we want to obtain."

The key to coming up with a good model, where you sometimes agree and sometimes disagree, but you ultimately get to the same place, is constant communication.

"If I have something that I don't agree with with one of my partners that I think



Kelley Kronenberg's
Howard Wander

"You can't let things build up."

is important, I'll contact him, and we'll talk about it," Wander says. "Communicate and get it off your chest. You can't let things build up. That's a recipe for disaster. We try to be very open with each other and talk things out, should there be a question."

For instance, if you're in a management team meeting and someone else on the team says something you don't like, don't just bury your disagreement.

"There are times I may call one of my other partners afterward and say, 'Hey, you made that comment about something. Let's talk about that a little bit,'" Wander

says. "There are times I'll say, 'You know what, you were right. I was wrong.' That's the opportunity for growth."

You need to make yourself available for these conversations to take place. For Wander, that means being available on his cell phone or at his home whenever someone needs to talk to him. It may not be convenient, but it comes with the responsibility of being the leader of your business.

"Someone asks me a question, they want it now," Wander says. "They don't want to hear about it two days from now."

When you make yourself available and open your literal and figurative doors to your people and your clients, you encourage your employees to do the same.

"The important part is to have everybody on staff sharing that vision and sharing that passion that I have and that others have to attain that vision," Wander says. "They are part of that team that is going to help make that vision occur."

Wander says the reason the firm has been able to grow is that everyone is committed to finding solutions to problems quickly and effectively resolving differences so that business can move forward.

"I need those people to have the confidence in me and the other partners on the management committee that we're making good decisions and we're all on the same page and we're all working toward something together," Wander says. <<

Use your resources

Do you talk to your current employees when you're looking to make a hire? If you don't, you might be making a big mistake. Your staff can be a great resource for finding people who will be a great fit in your organization.

"I need my key people to find new key people," says Howard Wander, one of the managing partners at the 140-employee Kelley Kronenberg. "They are recommending people to me who they know fit our image and fit our mindset of who would be a successful person in our firm. Occasionally, we do go out, but it's hard because you don't know who you are getting and if they are going to share the passion and vision of what you're trying to attain. It starts with talking to your people and letting them bring people to you."

One of the essential parts of any successful business is continuity. As people advance or leave your organizations, others need to be able to step up and fill their roles. When you're working with your employees to find new people, that continuity is much easier to maintain.

"You're only as good as the guy next to you or the support staff you have," Wander says. "If there is a weak link next to you, the whole team falls." <<

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