



/// It's About Time Respect!

Many people who know me, know that I have this thing for starting and stopping on time. Most just assume it's because of my military background. Nothing could be further from the truth. Let me tell you a story...

I've learned many powerful lessons in this life. One of the most painful lessons I ever learned came when I was at what I thought was the top of my career. I had just assumed responsibility for a major program located in Alaska and the situation was dire. The military had just issued a "Show Cause" letter. That's the last step before they debar your company from doing business with the government. The Navy and the Air Force were furious. The previous management team had done so poorly that the Teamsters labor union contract took effect the same day I arrived on site. And as if all that was not enough, morale was lower than I had ever seen in a group of people responsible for doing a task with National Security implications. Sounds like a great first day at a new job...

I informed my company, the military, and my new employees I would not be making any changes until I had a chance to completely understand the situation and could identify true root causes. I set a three-month goal for this evaluation. And it took that for me to visit every employee, every customer, and every site on a 66,000 square mile operation.

Because this was so large, and the potential fate of a \$46 billion-dollar firm could have been negatively affected, I wanted to have my plan reviewed and assessed by somebody I trusted... implicitly...before I briefed the world on what we were going to do. So, I called up my mentor, who had retired to Florida, to come up to North Pole Alaska. I wanted him to do a Red Team Review on our plans. First lesson learned: never bring a guy from Florida to Alaska in February during a major snow storm with the temperature around -45 degrees. Almost killing your mentor is really not a good start!

The first morning, we had a major blizzard and flight operations. I had planned for us to do a staff briefing at 09:00 and had set everything up in our largest conference room. I had spent the first three months teaching my staff how to do an effective staff meeting. First, don't spend 5 seconds telling what you didn't get done. We will have a separate and private meeting for that. Tell me what you did, where you are in your plan, and what you need to complete the plan. That's the essence of a good staff meeting agenda. It was going to be a thing of beauty! We were all prepared. The dry run on Friday before went extremely well, and everyone knew their message.

Because of the blizzard and the Flight Ops, my VP of Operations, my VP of Engineering, and my Director of Quality were not in the room at 09:00. I stated that I wanted to use everyone's time wisely. So, I had each of my team that was there on time introduce themselves to my mentor and allowed him to introduce himself to them. Sure enough, by the time we were done, everyone had arrived and we began. It was a powerful briefing that went exactly as planned. I was proud of my team and their work.

As we walked back to my office through knee-deep snow and bone chilling temps, I asked my mentor what he thought. His response shocked me to my core. He stopped and pulled his hood



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back from his parka so I could see his face and especially his eyes. He put his finger in my chest and said in a voice I had never heard "That is not how I taught you, that was completely unacceptable." I was stunned. I thought it was a good brief! I asked him what we did wrong. He immediately corrected me. "We" didn't do anything wrong. You did! You disrespected nine people on your team and gave honor to the three who showed up late! I immediately explained about the weather, the operations, and the unique environment of Alaska. He stopped me cold. "It was the same weather for everybody...It was the same operations for everybody...And unless I am missing something, it's the same location for us all. And yet, you waited for three people who clearly thought they were more important than what you had asked them to do, and made those who did what you asked wait until they showed up. That's not leadership. That's disrespectful".

I was angry at my mentor. I couldn't believe he didn't understand the situation. We didn't talk all the way back to my office across the flight line. But the closer I got to my office, the more I realized my old friend was exactly right. You see, it's not about time. Its not about status. Its not about our "importance". Its about respect. Respect for ourselves and each other. I **had** disrespected the members of my team who were there on time. And I had told them by my actions that the three who were late were more important than they were. Absolutely the wrong message.

From that day until this, if a meeting is supposed to begin at 08:30...it begins at 08:30...Precisely! If we agree to stop at 3 PM...We stop at precisely 3 PM. Its not about the military...It's not about time. It's about respect. You can change the culture of your organization by your actions. Don't wait for somebody else. **YOU** do it. And demand your team treat each other with respect in this manner. You will be amazed at the amount of influence one person can have who is doing the right thing...It's the only thing that can change behavior. Let it begin with you!

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