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Focus

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Don't Put Wine in a Sippy Cup

Perfect Spring weather and a convivial atmosphere set the stage as my wife and I visited with our neighbors on their deck. The ladies were drinking Chardonnay from insulated acrylic tumblers with tops, which we call "adult sippy cups." All was well until our neighbor's adorable toddler demanded a drink from her Mom's beverage. When that request failed, she demanded her own sippy cup. The adults laughed, but Addie got apple juice in a sippy cup!

I'm going to take this typical family story and apply it to leadership.

Leaders -- or aspiring leaders -- should never forget they are constantly scrutinized by their followers. When a leader has a bad day and shows it, his behaviors reverberate throughout the organization. In the same manner, a leader who exhibits admirable behavior sets a good example for others to follow.

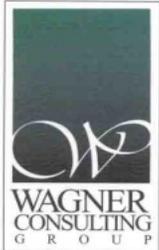
You readers already know this. I'm just reminding you and amplifying the point that strategically demonstrating specific behaviors can help build a culture that changes employee attitudes. Remember, behavior is based on thoughts and beliefs, so behavioral change will follow a change in attitudes just as day follows night.

You cannot be phony about this; people spot insincerity in a heartbeat. But you *can* choose certain behaviors on which to concentrate. For example, if you want to build trust, you must first show trust. In practice, this might be rewarding rather than punishing an employee who spoke up about a *verboden* subject or admitted a mistake. A leader could make himself vulnerable to begin a discussion about ways to improve a business. Also, when the leader speaks she should honor those absent, be they customers or employees, by avoiding gossip or criticizing someone who is not there to defend themselves. In this

vein, the leader should also call out employees who violate trust by gossiping about others.

In the end, it's all about integrity: there should be no space between what you say and what you do. Also, remember to drink adult beverages in appropriate containers when you're around children!

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