

Barry Slauenwhite, CEO of Compassion Canada's, Perspective on Management

Based on an interview August 5, 2008

With this month's focus on management, we wanted to find someone who excels at management to share what they know. Compassion Canada, which has a budget of \$40 million dollars, 60 staff and 500 volunteers, received very high scores, 4.61 out of 5, for management on their last employee survey. For this reason, we interviewed Barry Slauenwhite, CEO of Compassion Canada, hoping he would have something to tell our readers about how to succeed at management. I think you will see that we found just what we were looking for.

Barry's management background began as he was the owner of his own business. But then he felt called to the ministry. Even as a pastor, however, he felt a call to run the church in such a way as to catch the eye of business leaders. Taking a position at Compassion Canada was then the perfect outlet for both his desire to be doing Kingdom work and also glorify God by managing well. Barry views his role at Compassion Canada more as a pastor than a CEO in that he knows he is there to minister to his staff.

When Barry thinks about a poorly run organization, he visualizes one where there is a lack of integrity. That is, management doesn't care about their staff, people are dishonest, etc. Conversely, a well-managed organization is marked by integrity and trust. Barry explains that he can't live or work in a world without trust.

Barry admits that this view of good management is not the traditional view. Traditionally good management is described as being fiscally responsible. For Barry this is a given, but it isn't enough. Even if the books are balanced, he explains, if people are miserable working there, it isn't well managed.

Barry accounts for his management success in part due to the cultural standards he established when he first became the CEO. This list (which is attached) was just a brainstorm of words with short descriptions of what he was looking for in the culture at Compassion Canada. The culture is the day to day workings; "who we are, how we live." He wanted these things to typify his time as leader of Compassion Canada. After formulating the standards, he took his staff on a two-day retreat to go over them and have them be internalized.

Now, employees encounter the culture standards in the employee handbook as well as annually in the performance review process. Staff are evaluated on how well they contribute to the corporate culture that Barry established.

The basis for these standards, which begin with showing respect to each other, is Barry's understanding that management is not about using people for your end. Christian management is helping God's people exercise their spiritual gifts and natural abilities in a harmonious way to the benefit of his kingdom. Barry considers his job as CEO to be ensuring that everyone around him can reach their potential. Thus, he focuses on training, removing obstacles and shaping the culture.



Barry can't remember a day when he came to work without a smile on his face. He believes that everyone should enjoy their work. Part of why he enjoys what he does is that he knows he is making a difference and making an impact. Barry's desire is to create a place where everyone feels the same way, that they are making a difference, no matter what role they have at Compassion Canada.

Trust, Barry asserts, is the key ingredient to successful management. The reason being that you can't always control, dictate or monitor your employees. Plus, even if you could, it would be more efficient to operate in an environment of trust. For Barry, the mark of a good leader is hiring competent people that you build up to do the work that God has called them to do. He warns that leaders will still be disappointed sometimes because we are fallen people, but overall, this is the way to a successfully run organization. Compassion Canada is currently experiencing 20% growth annually. This is proof that people respond to trust by take ownership, excelling and going the extra mile. It is comparable to a child that is trusted and wants to make their parents proud.

In order to integrate trust into an organization, Barry says you must first be a trustworthy leader. Also, if someone acts untrustworthily it is dealt with publicly. For example, Barry once had to fire a manager who didn't show respect to a staff member, the top of the list of culture standards. This shows everyone that you mean what you say. No one is perfect; we all make of mistakes, but one should own up to them when they are made. Acknowledging a mistake only undermines a leader's authority if he is reckless and makes them constantly.

Trust doesn't negate the need for accountability. Barry says the way to build accountability is to see it as a two way street. As a CEO he is just as accountable to his staff as they are to him. He believes he had to earn his right to hold them accountable.

Barry admits that one of the hardest things leaders have had to do is to create an atmosphere where people aren't afraid to make a mistake. At Compassion Canada, he emphasizes that mistakes are part of daily life, but when we make them we need to learn from them so as not to repeat them. Barry finds it lamentable how we, as Christians, frown on mistakes. We are so hard on each other. Barry points out that it's at those times that you make mistakes that you learn and grow the most. As an example, Compassion Canada's anniversary celebration a few years ago was a flop, but much of their double digit growth is due to what they learned there.

Strategy and culture are closely married, but you need culture first Barry insists. As CEO, Barry sees it as his responsibility to influence others at Compassion Canada. But he has set up a leadership team consisting of him and six other managers, who meet weekly. Everyone knows that decisions are made by the team, even if he is away. Further, if someone pushes him on something, he will defer it to the team if possible. Barry believes in investing in those around him and he trains his leadership team to do the same, thus reaching every employee at Compassion Canada. To Barry, strategic leadership is all about training leaders, for disciples are really servant leaders.

Barry heartily agrees with Best Christian Workplaces Institute's vision that Christian workplaces should be the standard. He operates on the principle that people rise to the level you treat them.

Also, there is a link between being well-managed and listening to the opinions of employees. One of the first things Barry did as CEO was to put a suggestion box in the office where anonymous notes could be left that he promised to personally read. This suggestion box



became an icon of respecting each other. Also, at a retreat he had every employ present fill out a form saying what they would do if they were CEO. This gave Barry some of his most successful implementations. Along the same vein, Barry makes a point of celebrating new ideas, initiatives, etc. This attitude likewise influences the managers who go back to those they oversee and encourage them in a climate of innovation, reinforcing that Compassion Canada is about new ideas. In Christian organizations putting people on a pedestal is rare, but Barry does this. An insecure leader would be fearful of this, but to him, the credit should go to the one who conceived of the idea and those how helped cultivate the climate of creativity.

A long time ago Barry vowed to never limit his attention to addressing things people are doing wrong. Therefore, he meets face to face once a month with each of his managers. They talk about their lives outside of work as well as their jobs. Accountability is likewise a daily thing. We need to be able to hold each other accountable. There shouldn't be surprises; it is necessary to be transparent in relationships at work.

Communication of all kinds is important as a lack of it limits a staff's power. Therefore, Barry makes it a practice to relate what happens at board meetings to his staff. Everyone knows what is going on because everyone has a role to play.

Barry strategy of empowering his staff to fulfill their purpose in God's kingdom has produced results. In addition to the outstanding scores mentioned at the beginning of this article, Compassion Canada has been given the highest award for management among not for profit organizations studied by Richard Ivey School of Business students. Consequently Barry is a regular lecturer at the Richard Ivey School of Business on effective management practices.

