

The 21st Century Leader

Restoring trust, influence and common sense



By Lou Solomon

When you meet Jane McIntyre, you know instantly you're with the real deal. She is CEO of the United Way of the Central Carolinas, one of the largest fund-raising agencies in the country- -but it's not about her title. She is admired for turning around non-profit agencies in free fall, but it's not about her reputation. She is deeply Southern without apology, but it's not about her Carolina drawl.

No, Jane McIntyre is distinctly real because she is full of heart and takes zero crap. You recognize the look in her eyes as the mark of someone who knows who she is—and has the confidence to risk moments of vulnerability. She tells you the truth. She fakes nothing.

In 2008, McIntyre's predecessor left her post in disgrace and the agency in crisis. The newspaper ran stories daily about her greed and mismanagement and the community was outraged.

Contributions dipped and the employees of UWCC were scapegoated. The scandal was poignant as the bigger economic crisis turned darker.

McIntyre, who was heading up the YWCA, stepped up and took the job no one wanted, which was to bring UWCC back from the edge. At the same time, she became my client—and one of the most colorful to date. She is small in stature but every bit of a red-headed cowgirl who can rope the biggest steer at any rodeo.

McIntyre made it clear to the employees at United Way that she would ask a lot of them—but together they would do extraordinary work to change lives. The employees have delivered because they trust her, which is no small thing in this economy.

We've all been living with scandal, crises and uncertainty since the recession hit in 2008. The greatest majority of employees

in this country are disengaged and distrustful of leaders--and distrust can erode an organization's bottom line. Gallup estimates that employers lose between \$450 billion to \$550 billion a year due to employees who lack commitment to their work—and contribute to absenteeism, employee theft, poor service, safety- violations, turnover and mediocre work.

At this crossroads, we have to pause and become intentional about the future. Crazy amounts of money are pumped into business processes, while employees long for the kind of human connection and common sense that builds trust, inspired engagement and pushes performance.

Three Stories

We need a new kind of leader who is ready for the rodeo of the 21st Century. The corporate landscape has become a place of so much posturing and over-managed communication that leaders don't trust themselves to get real.

Before each talk, Jane considers, "What's the most important thing I should be talking about today?" I can tell you it's never about statistics and data. Jane knows that people just like her are looking for a meaningful conversation.

There are three stories every leader should know: Who I Am, Who We Are, and Where We Are Going. People need to hear these stories to trust your motives (and by the way, you can't fake it, you have to feel it).

Who I Am is not found on your resume or bio. It is the story of what your life has taught you and the obstacles you've overcome on your way to being a leader. One of the many defining stories Jane shares with people is her battle with cancer in her twenties. She tells them that the disease forced her to grow up. She tells them she has not taken one day for granted since. She advises, "You've got to live to the max. One day you look up and say, 'It's time to go to work.'" People can see who she is and they trust her because she "Walks the Talk."

Who We Are is the story of defining successes within the organization. Jane is intimately aware of the unique abilities of the individuals who work for her. She doesn't care about triple-degrees nearly as much as she cares about people who are smart and have the heart that it takes to do meaningful work. She celebrates the employees, contributors, heads of agencies and clients of United Way. She does it in a way that makes the core values of her organization crystal clear.

Where We Are Going is the focus and vision of the leader who understands the greatest good for all involved. Upon accepting the position, McIntyre appeared on an NPR affiliate talk show and began driving the conversation from scandal to, "What's important is that the United Way makes a difference to thousands of people in our region and in the community. That message has been lost. It's time to get the focus back and ask how we can do more for the people who can lift the entire region." This is no script. McIntyre says it with heart and she says it often.

Can you restore trust in your for-profit organization? The answer is yes, but there are no short cuts. The human connection is an attitude, a practice, a commitment and a relief valve.

Within less than one week on the job, McIntyre was meeting one-on-one with every employee before moving to the large contributors, and then to the community agency leaders. No one heard her sugar coat, awfulize or put a spin on the truth. She listened and she laid out her vision, along with what it would take to get there.

Jane never led from the fear of loss of funding. She led from a positive urgency. She said, “It’s time to go to work.” She invited people to be a part of it. For those who said “yes” to the new landscape, she extended trust by delegating power.

It hasn’t been easy. Jane has had to make tough calls. When she did, she gave employees as much information as soon as she could. She shared the realities she was weighing and her intention for the best, balanced outcome. She didn’t hide budget cuts under a flowery name.

7 Steps to Restore Trust

1. Show up and look people in the eye. Be interested, ask questions and listen.
2. Zero-crap mindset. Everyone has spin-fatigue. Say something real—and people will hear you.
3. Keep big and small promises and choose people over immediate personal gain.
4. Lead from positive urgency, not negative fear.
5. Invite people to the table, ask for feedback and thank them for it.
6. Know your three leadership stories and tell them from the heart.
7. Get honest with yourself. What keeps you from being real and saying what needs to be said? Start where you are.

You must be strong, talented and competent. But employees want to follow leaders who are also honest, likeable, personable, inclusive and regular people.

McIntyre has a way of connecting with the common sense and dignity within people. She leverages meetings, speeches, interviews and conversations as a strategy for making human connections to drive the United Way agenda. She has brought one of the nation's leading agencies back, one interaction at a time.

Is any of this easy? No, but leadership in the 21st Century is no cakewalk. As Jane has said in the past, "If you can't take the heat, you shouldn't be in leadership."



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