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## Opinion

### Team presidents must be wary of changes to the road ahead

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**BILL SUTTON**

Several months ago in this column I took a page from Jim Collins' "Good to Great." In that book Collins used the image of a bus to stress the importance of matching the appropriate individuals with the roles best suited to their abilities and temperaments.

To continue with the same metaphor, as team presidents are responsible for driving their respective buses, let's discuss the importance of having a good bus driver to take the passengers on their journey. The rules/suggestions listed below are common best practices for visionary "bus drivers."

#### 1. Be connected.

A good bus driver is tuned in to his passengers. He knows their routes, destinations and the points of interest along the way most appealing to each of them. He knows what motivates them and why they choose to travel.

Similarly, an effective team president understands that every employee is different in management style, incentives and motivational approaches required to maneuver effectively in a demanding journey with a variety of turns and detours.

#### 2. Maintain your "vehicle" to ensure peak performance.

Every driver should realize the importance of knowing the nuances of his vehicle and adhering to a regular maintenance program. In the same way, a team president should conduct regular inspections of his organization, observing and interacting with staff at all levels.

A small part that fails to run properly can cause the vehicle to stall and be passed by similar vehicles, which may arrive earlier at the destination and more efficiently because they have been properly tuned up.

Visiting the sales room and the box office can be motivational octane for the staff and increase efficiency and productivity.

#### 3. Identify alternative routes and points of interest.

Any experienced bus driver, when confronted with an accident or traffic jam, can determine an alternate route or, in some cases, a short cut. Oftentimes, these alternative routes are the result of knowing the terrain. In other cases, the routes are the product of shared experiences between drivers who exchange experiences.

Team presidents should network with other presidents to share best practices and relate their experiences to help plan better routes or develop alternatives when indicators point to the possibility of difficulty ahead.

#### 4. Fuel efficiency is based in part upon driving style.

Given the high price of fuel, it is essential that vehicles not only be tuned up, but also be driven consistently at an appropriate speed to maximize fuel efficiency.

A staff responds to the pace of its leadership. Constant speeding tends to burn out employees, and the cost of replacing the employee and the lost productivity until the replacement is up to speed is a common characteristic of sales departments.

Drivers need to know when to ease off the gas and coast for short periods in order to save fuel for driving the uphill part of the journey.

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5. Keep an inventory of spare parts at all times.

The constant day-to-day grind and demands of the road can take its toll on engine parts. While regular inspection and maintenance can prevent breakdowns, there comes a point when parts simply wear out or need to be replaced because a better, upgraded part may be available.

This is also true with the most vital parts of the organization: the employees. Sooner or later, good employees will leave for better opportunities and poor employees will be dismissed to avoid breakdowns.

A consistent, ongoing recruiting and interviewing program can protect the organization when an employee needs to be replaced.

6. Keep up with technological innovations.

This can improve the journey and make the trip more productive and rewarding for everyone. The application of GPS for vehicles has had a dynamic impact, especially on rookie drivers who can now plot an effective course with limited experience.

Team presidents need to understand the benefits and potential return on investment from technological innovations such as effective customer relationship management software applications, wireless applications for purchasing and ordering and admission replacing costly paper tickets.

7. Realize and acknowledge the joys and contributions involved in reaching the destination safely, efficiently and ahead of schedule.

Upon arrival, the bus driver thanks his passengers and wishes them well as they leave the vehicle. The team president also needs to communicate with every employee involved in reaching the destination.

Incentives, bonuses and other forms of recognition and appreciation are not only good business, but also help parts last longer and thus may be more cost-efficient in the long run.

Team presidents must focus on the road ahead and maneuver their organizations efficiently, safely and productively through a route that can change because of construction, bad weather and traffic.

An effective president, like a good bus driver, will keep the passengers foremost in mind and nimbly and adeptly blend their interests and skills to reach their common destination.

**Bill Sutton** ([wsutton@bus.ucf.edu](mailto:wsutton@bus.ucf.edu)) is the associate department head and professor in the DeVos Sport Business Management program at the University of Central Florida and principal of **Bill Sutton & Associates**.

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