



National Van Lines CEO: Great leadership is a personal journey

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Great leadership is a personal journey that cannot be learned through a book, according to National Van Lines CEO Maureen Beal.



Beal spoke of her personal leadership journey to a group of local business executives at the Annual Awards for Business Excellence ceremony on Wednesday in Wheaton, hosted by the Daily Herald Business Ledger.

Beal, whose grandfather started the Broadview-based national moving company more than 75 years ago, told the group a company "should never be so large as to lose sight of the personal connection we have"

with its employees and customers.

Beal listed five points to great leadership, all of them learned from her personal life experiences. She said a leader must develop his or her own style, noting hers is "nurturing, bordering on motherly." She stressed that all leaders should practice a version of the Golden Rule in that "we treat our employees the same way we want our children treated by their employees."

Second, she said in order to be a leader, you sometimes have to leave. She spoke of her experience leaving management to work in customer service and listening to the stories her co-workers told of their bosses.

"Some of the best leadership learning happened in the cafeteria," she said. "I learned a lot about what not to do as a boss just by listening."

As a result, Beal said, she created several employee-focused communication initiatives when she returned to a management role at National Van Lines, based on near West suburban Broadview.

Leaders also must lead by example, Beal said. Leaders must be role models for their employees by setting high standards and living up to those standards. Those who do will find their employees following in their direction.

"Leaders can't expect employees to adhere to business hours if the leadership is coming in late or leaving early," she said.

Leaders need to listen to their employees and be more compassionate, she added. Employees need to feel that they are valued, especially during these tough economic times. Leaders need to be more sensitive to employees and their families, Beal said, noting that company-led family events such as holiday parties and summer picnics are “priceless” in assuring employees feel they are being treated with dignity and respect.

Finally, leaders need to bring their values to work. Beal noted that her values of giving back to the community through charity and volunteer events are reflected through a large and active participation by employees.

“We are blessed with employees that are extremely loyal, and it is because of our corporate culture,” Beal said.

Seventeen companies and associations received the AABE awards, which recognize the best in local businesses and associations. The winners will be featured in the April 28 edition of the Business Ledger.

Presenting sponsors of the AABE were Associated Bank, B. Gunther and Co. and Tasty Catering. Marketing partner was LeaderBoard Tournament Systems