

SIMON ON LEADING WINNING TEAMS

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SIMON ON SUCCESS

Simon says, "Follow me."

Sure, you say, no problem, but why is Simon the one to follow, what makes him a leader? More to the point, how can he help you develop and keep the level of PPS needed to lead a winning team, needed to be a great leader?

Maybe Simon is someone you want to follow; but then again, maybe not. The same holds for your developing necessary, leadership-critical skills. Maybe Simon can help with that, but maybe not. Let Simon offer some of his thoughts for your consideration. You can then judge for yourself.

Simon says, "Have a clear vision, a clear sense of mission that others want to follow."

Your old friend Simon has a clear vision of your mission, why you do what you do. What do you think about that for starters? Simon is not an expert at everything and does not profess to have all of the answers. Even with his limitations, though, old Simon has this "Why?" thing wired. Although he cannot guarantee you will get there, he can guarantee you will be headed in the right direction. What's more, he knows what motivates you, why you want to go, why you have to get there.

Simon says, "Value those who make the journey with you."

If you come aboard Simon's train, there are added benefits for you. You will be valued and what you do will be recognized and appreciated. This will be much more than a glad hand and speeches about how everyone is important and everyone's contribution matters. You will not just be part of the crowd who gets a thumbs-up now and then. Your friend Simon is assuring you that you, as an individual, matter and what you specifically do matters. In fact, the odds of success would go crashing downward were you not part of Simon's winning team.

Simon says, "Commit yourself to excellence."

You are not going to merely succeed, you are going to excel.

Following Simon's lead means you will be a valued member of a winning team that does the right things right, the first time, on time, every time. You will surpass your expectations, will help set the new standard, will be a member of the team to which others look and wonder how you do it.

Simon says, "Value your customers, those who benefit from your products and services."

As a member of Simon's winning team, your commitment to customer service will reach new heights. You will learn to be more responsive to the needs and interests of your customers than you had thought possible. Meeting or exceeding your customers' expectations is yesterday's standard. On Simon's team, every transaction with your customers is an opportunity to grow your relationship with them.

Whether your customers are interested in the advance of knowledge or a better hamburger, responsive public services or appropriate life insurance, Simon's team is there for them. Association with Simon's team is the road to wonderful outcomes for you and for your customers.

Simon says, "Appreciate where and how you fit in."

Simon knows his primary role is to help you succeed. You are not responsible for his success but he assuredly is responsible for facilitating yours. His task is to provide for you the best possible opportunity to get where you are committed to going. He saw your commitment and supported your being on his team because you are headed where he and the other members of the team want to go. From his perspective, you are his customer and he is growing a relationship with you.

Simon says, "Play by the rules."

Simon is not a loose cannon. He plays by the rules and demands everyone on his team does likewise. You have undoubtedly run across the leader who believes he is above everyone else. Leaders like this think rules are for other people and what they want and do are exceptions to any rules or established procedures. PPS is not something they have thought about a lot, not that doing so would help them much. They are very far away from ever achieving PPS. Arrogance and a superior attitude are the order of the day for these high-and-mighty types.

This insensitive demeanor is certainly inappropriate in anyone; and Simon understands it would be unacceptable in any leader and especially in a leader committed to PPS. You will get no such nonsense from him. Simon always plays it straight, according to the established and well-understood rules.

Simon says, "Do not pass your frustrations and negative feelings along to others."

Be careful. You could consider this point and easily come to the wrong conclusion. That would be like the farmer who saw the mouse in the corn crib and assumed she was planning on supper, when she was already quite satisfied by the cookies she just ate in his kitchen. What does Simon do with his frustrations and negative feelings, if he does not pass them along to others? He proactively shares them only with people who have a need to know about his perceptions and who can do something about the underlying problems or issues. You will not hear Simon sharing those sorts of things with team members, others who just happen to be around, or with customers.

Simon says, "Be positive and energetic whether things are going well or going badly."

This is another one of Simon's points where the wrong conclusion is at hand. Your friend Simon most assuredly does not see the plumbing's backing up as a great opportunity to bond with the plumber, just as he does not get suddenly energized by bad news. At the same time, he does not take the fact the plumbing backed up out on everyone else and does not act like someone let the air out of his tires whenever the news is not good.

Neither temper tantrums nor pouting are consistent with Simon's approach to problems and disappointments. He gave that nonsense up by the first grade. His attitude and commitment are his responsibilities and not reactions to people and events. If you are on Simon's winning team, you get the Simon you have come to know and count on, at his best, every day, every time, no exceptions, no excuses.

Simon says, "Accurately understand and appreciate your skills and limitations."

Knowing what he does well and then doing it well are among Simon's strongest assets. What you need to know is he will make a point of learning what you do well so you too spend most of your

time in the strength of your game. He understands his team cannot excel unless all team members spend most of their time doing what they do best.

There is another side of this strategy that is equally important, though. Simon knows his limitations and will come to know yours. The team is then developed in part by filling in the identified limitations with people who are strong in those areas. Beyond this, Simon is making a personal point. His limitations keep him from achieving his mission. He does not have the skills, know-how, and resources to get there by himself. For Simon, you are not just a follower, a member of the winning team. You are critical to his success.

Simon says, "Be well-organized."

"Organization" is among the few absolutely critical characteristics of a successful leader. Simon's special brand of organization goes far beyond the day to day need to keep track of things and activities, though. He has an organized mind. Simon can and does think about things in an unusually organized way, has at his mental fingertips a huge range of relevant information and concepts, and routinely demonstrates his special ability to mentally organize complex problems and issues.

Simon's level of mental organization sets him apart from merely competent leaders. He fully understands what needs to be understood. This by itself is impressive. The truly amazing thing, though, is Simon maintains this level of organization over time, as circumstances change, as what is important shifts, as information serves its purpose and is replaced with new information. Among other benefits for the team, Simon's exceptional mental organization lets him see problems before they are problems, opportunities before they are opportunities, and solutions before others recognize there is an issue. By the time something needs done, he has already done it. His master touch is he makes it look easy. Unless you observe closely, you may never know anything exceptional is happening, right before your eyes.

Simon says, "Be timely in all you do."

For Simon, being timely is mostly a matter of respect. Even Super Simon cannot always be on time and do everything on time every time; but it is definitely a major priority for him. If you are expecting him to be somewhere at a specific time, he will be there. If Simon commits to doing something, you can take it to the bank the job will be done, on time, every time.

This is great for those who deal with Simon; but there is an important other side. If you are on Simon's team, he expects you to be on time, do things when you promise, and to get the job done as agreed, every time. He will cut some slack; but not much. In this area, he is as demanding of those who are associated with him as he is with himself.

Simon says, "Pitch in and do what needs done."

Leaders are doers. This is a simple principle but Simon has elevated it to an art form. You can count on Simon to do what needs done and to give his 110%. Lazy is not a term anyone uses when talking about Simon.

What you also need to know is your leader Simon expects the same from everyone on his team. Put this in context, though. "Pitching in" does not apply to other people's work. If it needs done and they are not doing it, you can be certain it will get done, even if Simon needs to do it himself. At the same time, Simon will take whatever action is necessary to assure such negligence does not recur. Doing what needs done starts with doing what you are expected to do.

Having said that, there is always this and that needing done with no one specifically responsible for doing it. On Simon's team, it does not have to be said Simon will and does pitch in. The same level of responsibility and initiative is the order of the day for everyone else.

Simon says, "Keep focused on getting the job done."

Of course, Simon does not get into being negative and depressed about things. You already know he accepts personal responsibility for his attitude and behavior. He knows too it is easy to lose focus, to lose track of the goal.

Here is where Simon along with all truly effective leaders excels. Every event, every situation, every transaction is viewed by Simon through the mission's lens. Others may let their focus drift; but Simon is always there to bring them back. Others may be more focused some days than others; but Simon is there to sharpen their perspectives, to keep them continuously on task.

How does he do this? It always comes down to Simon's bottom line. He is obsessed with why he does what he does and with the cost of not doing it well, the first time, on time, every time. For Simon, the potential cost of losing focus is just too high.

Simon says, "Have faith in those who make the journey with you."

This starts with living the values and beliefs that are the trademarks of leaders who have carefully developed PPS. Specifically, it starts with not reflexively blaming or accusing someone whenever there is a problem. That initial level of faith is followed by believing people are normally honest and trustworthy. If you start by assuming a problem's coming up does not necessarily mean someone screwed up, you have opened your mind to the alternative possibilities. Assuming then team members are honest and trustworthy allows you to comfortably collaborate with them. Together, in the spirit of trust and good faith, you can best understand the problem and how to reduce the likelihood of its recurring.

Simon knows problems are usually not caused by anyone's inadequacy or failure. They are caused by the unexpected, by the improbable, or by things that could not be predicted or controlled. To start with the people instead of the problem runs a high chance of never solving the problem. It also runs an even higher risk of breaking trust with people, with the team. If the problem turns out to be with one or more of the people, Simon has strategies for handling that; but Simon has faith in you and invariably initiates problem solving from a good faith perspective.

What do you think so far? Is Simon a leader worthy of being followed by you? He is certainly demanding of those who would follow and has very high expectations for anyone who would join his team. If Simon's mission is one with which you identify, do you think teaming with Simon is your path to success? Simon is intense and not particularly open to those who would try to change or modify his mission. If you want to go where Simon is going, then welcome aboard. If not, Simon has no interest in your stepping onto his train.

Simon has a clear vision and equally clear rules for how those on the train are treated, how they engage the challenge, how they work together toward their common purpose. How does this resonate with you and with your values and beliefs? Are you aboard or not?

Next, consider Simon's leadership style. It is certainly distinct and well-defined. Your opportunity is to decide whether it is a model worthy of your emulation. Is Simon's leadership strategy one you want to adapt for yourself, your individual use, your personal situation? If so, Simon says, "It's ***yours. Use it in good faith and in good causes.***"

If not, Simon says, "I certainly respect your choice. My

strategy isn't for everyone. It's only what works for me. My hope is you develop one that works as well for you."

If you find you do resonate with Simon's leadership style, your friend Simon has more for you. You have learned about Simon's underlying philosophy and special approach with his customers: those on his team and those served by his team. You are invited to read on and to take to heart what you will along the way.

Simon says, "Take even the most minor complaint seriously."

Taking even minor complaints seriously is, for Simon, based on the fact people seldom complain unless there is a real issue. Simon knows as well people who are complaining want to be heard at least as much as they want something specific done, and sometimes more. Put these two truths together and you see Simon's strategy:

There likely is a real issue.

+ People want to be heard.

= Always take time to seriously listen.

Having listened, Simon then takes action or not, depending on what he hears. The point is the person gets the respect they deserve. What's more, Simon does not miss the opportunity to respond to something legitimately needing his attention.

Simon says, "Be open to ideas and suggestions from anyone."

You know Simon is mentally well-organized and has a vast supply of ideas and information at his mental fingertips. Well, now just where do you think all that wisdom came from? Did Simon figure it all out by himself? Not on his best day, my friend.

Simon is a mental sponge and he goes around soaking up ideas and suggestions everywhere, from everyone. He says, "I can't use the idea I didn't hear or follow the suggestion I didn't listen to."

His special strategy here goes beyond being open and listening, though. Simon's secret is he learns something from every idea, every suggestion, whomever its source. He listens and then he learns. That winning combination (listen and learn) is Simon's real success secret.

Simon says, "Understand problems and issues from other people's points of view."

This technique goes nicely with "listen and learn." Have you ever told someone about how a problem or issue looks from your point of view only to be told, "I don't see it that way. Let me tell you what the real issues are here."?

What is the not so subtle message to you? "You've got this all wrong. It's not that way at all. You are either stupid or out of touch with the real world. I am the source of all things right and will condescend to educate you."

You will never get that kind of demeaning approach from Simon. First, such disrespect is just not Simon's style. More importantly, he knows by using that approach, he loses. Just as he gets most of his ideas from others, Simon also gets most of his insights and new perspectives from other people. How does he do that? He listens and learns. He takes time to understand your perspective, to get your read on things. When he walks away, he has more of what he needs to lead: he has what he knows and now has part of what you know too. It is only a matter of time until Simon becomes brilliant, one conversation at a time.

Simon says, "Make sure a job can be done before holding anyone responsible for it."

Now there is a no-brainer for you. Who but an idiot would hold someone responsible for a job that cannot be done? Alas my friend, if idiots could fly, many so called leaders would have their own airports. Have you ever seen a project fail and someone reflexively gets reprimanded or fired? Never mind the project's history of success was limited to visions in someone's mind. It happens on a grand scale and in little situations; but expecting the impossible and holding someone accountable happens often and repeatedly.

It will not happen with you and Simon, though. You will be expected to try, to give it your best. You will not be held responsible for its not working out, though, unless Simon can objectively confirm it was doable.

Simon says, "Be clear with people about what you expect."

This starts with being clear about whether you actually expect the job to be done. You may only expect the person to give it a try, work on it if there is time, or to do as much as

interest and resources allow. Alternatively, you may expect the job to be done and done on time.

- Do you expect the person to work alone or to get help?
- Do you expect perfection or will just getting it done suffice today?

Simon knows being clear about expectations is a touchstone of great leadership. If you are on his winning team, you will always be clear about what he expects. You will never have to wonder or have doubts about that.

Simon says, "Take time to be sure people understand how their jobs fit in with other jobs and activities."

Simon does not go overboard here; but he does obsessively attend to one element of fitting in. With Simon as your leader, you will always completely understand how what you do fits into the plan for the team to achieve its mission. You will know why you do what you do.

Simon will also be sure you see how your job fits with other jobs that affect or are affected by yours. Although you may not see every necessary connection, knowing why your job is important is essential to your success and to the success of the team. People want their efforts to make a positive difference; and Simon will make sure you do not doubt the value of your contribution.

Simon says, "Give people clear reasons and explanations whenever they ask for them."

"Why?" is a question for which people want an answer that makes sense to them. If they do not get it, they will fill in their own answers. Having filled in the blank, they now have a do-it-yourself explanation for everything. People make sense of their environments, whether it has any relationship to reality or not. What is the result? There are many, usually conflicting explanations for anything that happens and nearly as many for things that do not happen and are not going to happen. Therein lies the source of the old rumor mill.

Even Simon cannot stop the rumor mill, as much as he would like to put it out of business. Gossip is a pastime to which people are addicted or at least seriously hooked. What he can do is be sure that anyone who is responsible enough to actually ask gets the straight scoop. That does not stop the rumor mill; but

it does slow it down a little and can redirect it now and then. More importantly, if you bring your questions to Simon, you will get the honesty and respect you deserve. Not to give you reasons and explanations when you ask for them would be unacceptable, from Simon's perspective.

Simon says, "Delegate often and well."

Delegation is, for Simon, a critical key to his success. He knows leadership superstars have elevated effective delegation to an art form. In fact, success with delegation is the single most important factor separating leaders who achieve their mission-specific goals from those who do not.

Try this. Design a one legged stool. One end of the leg must be attached to the stool and the other end can touch the ground at one single point but cannot be in the ground or supported by anything else. The stool must be functional, serving the usual purpose of being a place for a person to rest those weary bones.

It is actually fairly easy. Get a board and attach the leg to it. Set the stool up and sit on it. So long as you are sitting on it, your stool works fine. The problem is, if you get up, your stool falls over. You have to do the work of the missing legs yourself which works fine if you have nothing else to do and are willing to sit on the stool forever. Now if you are not quite up to eternity on the stool, you will need to make other arrangements: you have to delegate.

Since Simon is not about to spend his life sitting on the stool, he has three rules for getting others on the team to pitch in. First, he appropriately delegates tasks and duties. You see he does not pass on his responsibilities. He is still responsible for the teams success; but others on the team can and should help carry the load. This cannot be a "whomever happens to be around" process. Simon is careful to only delegate to people who have the skills and know-how to get the job done; they have to be up to it.

Second, Simon does not delegate a job to someone and then try to manage it himself or second-guess the person who was assigned the job. His reasons here are important. Simon is not going to sit on the stool and is not about to hover around just to be sure the job gets done or it is not screwed up. If he needs to do that, he might as well sit on the stool himself. More importantly, second guessing and a hands-on approach with delegated tasks would mean he did not have much confidence in the person given the assignment. If that is where it is, Simon screwed up. He delegated inappropriately: he picked the wrong person to hold up the stool.

Third, Simon always delegates enough authority so the person can get the job done. This does not mean he gives anyone an unlimited, free reign. What each person does must fit with everyone else's activities. The team needs to work together as a team. At the same time, each team member needs the freedom and authority to do what needs done.

Simon does not get into "Mother, may I?" It certainly is not a "Check with me at every step along the way for authorization," approach for Simon's team. Those on the team are competent, make good choices and decisions, and can be trusted to do the right things right. If this is not true, Simon needs to reexamine who is on his team and think about who may need to be replaced. Nonetheless, not to give people the authority they need to get the job done would mean Simon does not quite trust, does not really believe. It would also mean he is still holding up the stool instead of getting on with getting on down the road.

Simon says, "Get the resources needed to get the job done."

A leader's job is to facilitate the team's success. Being sure available resources are sufficient for success is, in turn, the leader's responsibility. There may be others on the team who have tasks and assignments related to resource development; but if the resources are not there when they are needed, the leader has not gotten the job done.

If the train runs on coal, the leader better have continuous access to the coal mine. If success depends on new ideas, the leader will be well-served by cultivating a close relationship with a guru. If success depends on creativity, exceptional talents, and specialized skills, the leader must commit to recruiting and retaining only the brightest and best people for the team. Simon knows not having enough of the right resources when they are needed is the surest route to failure; and fail he will not.

Simon says, "Be skilled at using informal strategies to get things done."

Simon certainly is talking from experience. There are formal policies, procedures, and ways things are to be done. It is also true they sometimes do not work and situations come up where there is no formalized approach that will get from here to there in the time available to get there. Now and then, though, people take this to mean they can ignore the rules, not pay attention to the formal processes. This definitely is not Simon's point. The

informal approach supplements formal procedures and is not a substitute for them.

People also sometimes see the informal approach as a convenient way to bypass the chain of command, to shortcut processes they think take too long, to shop around for the decision they want, or to avoid jobs they do not like. This is not what Simon has in mind either. For Simon, the informal approach is simply one more strategy available to him within the formal context.

Simon wants his team to use informal strategies, to talk with each other, to informally innovate when they need to, to avoid being too rigid about the rules when something unusual comes up that does not quite fit into the established procedures. They are responsible people who can and are expected to use their good judgment and common sense. Simon liberally uses informal strategies himself; but you can have too much of a good thing.

Being skilled at using informal strategies includes knowing when to use them and when formal is best. If informal strategies are used too much or inappropriately, things become disorganized, efficiency and quality suffer. If they are used too little, the team becomes rigid and inflexible, creativity and innovation disappear, and the team loses its cutting edge. On Simon's winning team, the real skill in using informal strategies is in finding and maintaining the balance.

Simon says, "Understand and tap the knowledge, skills, and resources of everyone."

You are not surprised? That old cat is already out of the bag? Simon's secret is no secret anymore? Your friend Simon is a sponge who goes around soaking up whatever serves his team's purposes. Everyone's knowledge, skills, and resources fit right in with his absorption strategy.

Here is what you may not know. Simon is also a master at finding the specific know-how, particular skill, or perfect resource for the immediate purpose, whatever the need happens to be. He knows someone who either has or can get exactly what the doctor calls for, so to speak. When the success puzzle requires a new or unusual piece, Simon reaches out, pulls it in, and slips it into place. What's more, it is miraculously an exact fit, not just what the doctor ordered. It is a cure for whatever the condition happened to be.

How does Simon do it? He sees everyone he meets as a potential resource for his team. He then talks with them about what they do, their knowledge, their skills, their resources. Of

course, they are normally pleased with Simon's interest and happy to share with him. What they do not know is sociable Simon is listening and filing away anything that may one day be a piece for his success puzzle. He then remembers the potentially useful details he has learned, ready to tap them when the time comes.

Surprise of surprises. That Simon is using the "listen and learn" strategy again. It is beginning to look like that may be another one of those absolutely critical characteristics of effective leadership. As you consider your developing leadership style, you may want to snatch this strategy from Simon and incorporate it into your personal inventory of leadership tools. It will serve you well.

Simon says, "Distribute work and responsibilities efficiently and fairly."

Distributing assignments efficiently is a science in its own right; and Simon does it well. Being sure the right people are assigned to the right tasks is where it starts. It goes on to include being sure things are done in the right order, at the right time. The science of efficiency expands out to include avoiding bottlenecks, eliminating any loss of resources and materials, preventing errors and having to do things over again, and getting continuous feedback from customers. Achieving and maintaining efficiency is quite complex.

For Simon, though, there is an underlying dimension skilled leaders emphasize at least as much as maximizing the efficient conversion of resources into products and services that are fully responsive to the needs and interests of customers. Simon does not take advantage of anyone. The secret is there are obvious and not so obvious ways people are taken advantage of; and Simon avoids them all.

The most blatant abuse happens when a good team member has more and more work piled on top of work piled on yesterday. Another version of the same kind of abuse happens when work is given to someone just because the leader is not going to get any hassle or flack. Some people have positive attitudes and just do not say, "No," when asked to do something. They are simply too nice for their own good; but fortunately, Simon understands even his best workhorse can be run too fast or pushed too hard. The best of them needs a good measure of oats and some time in the barn now and then.

Two other areas of unfairness and abuse are also worth noting. First, tolerating anyone's not doing what is expected or doing less than is expected is unfair to others on the team. Letting shirkers get away with it does nothing but shift the

burden unfairly onto others. Second, assuming everyone is equally efficient is wrong. This is particularly unfair to those who are unusually efficient. The exceptional few can routinely do a two-hour job in an hour and a half. Do you then expect them to do more work in the extra half hour? Simon does not think so. He will discuss options with them; but the choice is theirs. Simon certainly would not increase the load just because someone is especially efficient and hard-working.

There is a further but hidden area of unfairness even Simon can overlook if he is not very attentive. People should not be expected to do things they do not know how to do or do not know how to do well. The solution here is fairly simple. Identify individuals who do know how to do what is expected and add them to the team. For Simon, there is an even better solution. Train people who are already on the team to do the job, to do it well. They are already onboard, already committed to the mission, already vested in the team's success. Simon knows it is always better to invest in those who are already on your team than to take a chance on newcomers. The Johnny-come-lately likely will do fine; but Simon prefers sticking with the horses that got him there, whenever he can.

Simon says, "Defer to others when they are more knowledgeable, skilled, or competent."

None but a certifiable power junky would go with his own ideas and skills when someone more competent is readily available. Nonetheless, power junkies are more prevalent than you might think. You can find them mostly in the middle ranks but rarely at the top. Leaders do not get there by ignoring or overlooking expertise in others and especially not in people whose knowledge, skills, and resources can increase their chances for success. Skilled leaders take full advantage of whatever may give them the winning edge.

Simon's reason for deferring to the expertise of others goes a little farther, though. He truly values differing styles and opinions. Each person on the team has know-how, skills, and resources unlike those of anyone else. They all have their special areas of expertise. They also have their individual approaches, ways of thinking, and perspectives. This gives fullness and flavor to the team. Not to take advantage of this richness would be like ignoring the matador when he suggests you let him handle it this time.

Simon says, "Deal with problems before they become crises."

You already know Simon has an organized mind and an uncanny ability to see problems before they are problems, opportunities before anyone else knows an opportunity is at hand. There is a value-added benefit of having Simon as your leader you may not know about, though. Simon deals with problems and issues as soon as he becomes aware of them. It is part of his "do today's business today" approach to everything. It also makes it easier for him to have an organized mind. The less there is to keep track of, the easier it is to keep it organized.

You know about how hectic things are the day after vacation. Stuff has not gotten done and work is backed up. Did you know there are people whose days are like that all the time? Sure, it may be due to having impossible jobs where they are always behind. That is a different matter they need to deal with. More typically, though, the problem is caused by not doing today's business today, even though the opportunity is there to do it. They do the routine things but set the more difficult or unpleasant tasks aside. They want to think about it, will get back to it later, or do not feel like they have enough information.

Simon has learned most all of these tasks are five-minutes-or-less activities and require a decision or response to a problem or issue. It is not he does not have the time. He is avoiding action. His rule here is simple.

- First, delegate. Pass the problem or issue along to the person who has the needed information and the responsibility for the outcome. "Please take care of this. Let me know by next Tuesday how you handled it."
- Second, if you cannot delegate, the rule is handle it, now. Make the best decision you can, based on what you know right now. Trust your experience, your instincts, your well-tested judgment.
- Third, if you cannot delegate and are not prepared to act, the rule is to trash it. A lot of unnecessary work is appropriately avoided by this simple step.

Less than 5% of the non-routine tasks outlive the previous three rules. This is, at least, much more manageable. Simon's rule for this 5% councils,

- If you cannot finish it today, assign someone to work on it with you. That person is responsible for developing a completion schedule, getting the needed information together, and bringing a recommendation to you.

When the recommendation comes back, start with the first

rule and run the steps again. The most likely outcome is you accept the recommendation and delegate the task to the person who has been working on the problem or issue. However you handle it, today's business has been done today.

Simon says, "Do not react to people or problems impulsively."

As Simon follows his rules for being sure he does today's business today, His approach is not impulsive. First, he resists the temptation to just do something, do anything to make the person or problem go away.

- "What exactly would you like for me to do?"
- "How do you see this working out?"
- "What else have you tried before bringing this to me?"

Questions like these get more information. That is certainly true. Just as importantly, they slow things down. While Simon is listening, he mentally sorts through his options. By the time he has considered two or three, the impulse to just do something has passed and his response is at least more thoughtful than merely acting on the first thing coming to mind.

Most leaders are quick to act, quick to go with their first reactions, quick to follow their instincts. This characteristic is one of the personality elements separating the best leaders from the mediocre. The down-side of this is they are also extraordinarily reactive. Their mental and perceptual quickness can cause them to jump to wrong conclusions or act too quickly. The patience required to listen and learn can easily allude them.

Knowing this, Simon is slow to confront people and even slower to get into arguments, understanding these are normally impulsive events. He has no problem expressing his point of view and no reluctance to confront people when necessary. However, doing either without thought and clear reasons is risky and usually counterproductive.

An important benefit of Simon's more considered approach is he has an opportunity to exactly fit his reactions to the situation or circumstance. People tend to think the issue is over-reacting. This leadership pitfall is well-known. Simon's experience tells him, though, under-reacting is often a more significant problem. If his reaction is too intense, he can usually go back, apologize, and correct his reaction. If it is not intense enough, he may never know. He thinks he made his point but others do not think it was particularly important or he was all that serious. Getting the balance right is a continuing

challenge for Simon.

Being assertive but tactful is where the balance is to be found. Simon needs to be assertive enough to avoid any misunderstanding while being tactful enough to avoid emotionally pushing people away. Here is his secret. The more important and strongly held his point, the more quietly and the more slowly he makes it. Whispering would be going too far, even though people are more likely to hear and decide it is important if you whisper. Simon runs no chance he will not be heard and understood. At the same time, he gives these little voice clues it is time to listen and learn.

Of course, Simon does not interrupt. He waits his turn to talk, especially if he wants to make an important point. He has another little strategy, though. He waits until the conversation has moved on to another topic. He then says, "Let me take us back for a minute. We were talking about X. Let me make this point clearly. (He then succinctly makes the point he had not made before.) Thanks for letting me interrupt. We were talking about. . . ." His point will now neither be missed nor forgotten.

Simon says, "Be hard on problems and soft on people."

- People deserve consideration; problems do not.
- Simon wants good people to stay, annoying problems to go away.
- Problems need solutions; people need support.
- People are not the problem, problems are the problem.

You are driving along a country road and run out of gas. Are you the problem or is your being out of gas the problem. Should you choose to focus your frustration on yourself and not deal with the problem, you could easily miss the point.

Your being out of gas is not the problem either. Your immediate problem is you cannot go with your plan to get where you were going by driving your car. Suppose, just as you ran out of gas, your trusted brother and his friend stopped and offered to give you a ride.

There, your problem is solved; but not quite. You cannot leave your car on a country road. Oh well, you will just sit there and pound on yourself. You are not off the hook. You did run out of gas.

"I don't think so," you say. You will see if they can either siphon some gas from their car or go get some and bring it back to you. You will be at least soft enough on your self and hard enough on the problem to take advantage of what now seems like an obvious solution.

Be honest now. You did assume you had neglected to get gas, did you not? Had you paid more attention, you would have avoided the problem all together.

Stop and think about this for a minute. Are there other reasons why a car might run out of gas? Is your screwing up the only reasonable explanation? Maybe you did forget; but if that is your only consideration, you could easily miss other, more serious reasons.

You likely can now think of a couple of additional reasons why you might have run out of gas having nothing to do with your neglect; but why did you need coached? More importantly, do you suppose you would have been less hard on someone else, slower to jump to conclusions, had that person been driving the car instead of you? It is unlikely. That is Simon's point. There are other and many times more likely explanations for problems than, "People cause problems." As Simon might say, "Problems cause problems. People are problem solvers. Be soft on people if you really want your problems solved." It is the PPS thing to do. It is also most pragmatic and in your self-interest.

Simon says, "Be flexible and willing to compromise."

That Simon, do you suppose he has finally gone over the edge? It sounds like he is about a quart shy of the add mark or perhaps a half a bubble off plumb. Alas, he may have finally overdosed on PPS.

The next thing you know, he will be advising everyone to take turns, to remember something is better than nothing, you have to give a little to get a little. If he gets really carried away, you may even hear Nice Guy Simon saying things about not cutting off your nose to spite your face and it is better to lose the battle than to lose the war.

Thank you Simon. Have you ever played American football? I suspect you have not. On fourth down with 4 yards to go, it does not cut it to be flexible and compromise even if the other team does agree to give you three yards on a friendly basis, with no conflict or confrontation. It will not even help if they agree the next time you have the ball, you will only need nine yards for your initial first down. Okay, they are very flexible and ready to compromise. If you will just give them the ball now, you

can have a free point added to your score.

You acknowledge the utility of flexibility and compromise. You share, take turns, and are skilled at give-and-take. You do not expect to get your way every time, you are a team player; but you and your team are going to pass on the offers and go for it. If you get the four yards, that is great. If not, that is the way the game goes now and then. Either way, you will play, no flexibility, no compromise.

So, what is Simon's real message? It is wisdom in two parts. "Do not deal with people in win/lose terms, if it can be avoided."

Now, there is a message worth taking to heart. It is also a talent master leaders have carefully perfected. They know how to manage, how to be flexible, when to compromise, when to avoid getting into win/lose transactions. They have also developed the skills needed to avoid the rock's colliding with the hard place.

Successful leaders know equally well when it is time to shift to part two. They know when to move the hard place directly into the path of the rock. It would be convenient to tell you Simon has a well-tested guide to direct you to have the battle here but not there, to hang tough over this but not over that. Sorry, nothing so simple this time.

Each leader has to carefully pick and choose, being very cautious and thoughtful about the choices. Simon cannot say what or when; but he does council you to make the stand where and when it has to be made. Do so, fully understanding the consequences and being fully prepared to accept them, win or lose. Leaders have to do what leaders have to do; and leaders have to accept the consequences of their actions, no exceptions, no excuses.

Simon says, "Remember and own what you say, agree to, and do."

This certainly is a recommendation in favor of honesty and integrity. Simon is not one to lie, knowingly misrepresent, or to try to squirm out of things he says, agrees to, or does. He has the PPS basics down pat and follows them seriously and conscientiously. Simon is a leader of substance and character. His point must be directed at more equivocal situations.

People think you said what they think you said, agreed to what they think you agreed to, and did what they think you did. Therein lies Simon's opportunity. On the one hand, he can deny everything. "I never said that." "I certainly did not agree to that." "I did not do it." As option one, this has the advantage of simplicity.

On the other hand, Simon can capitulate. "Although I do not remember saying that, you are undoubtedly right." "If you think I agreed to it, then we have a deal." "If you say I did it, then I did it." As option two, this has the advantage of avoiding conflict.

Although simplicity has a lot going for it, option one has Simon obstinately contradicting whomever he is talking with at the time. "You are wrong and I am right." That is possibly not his best choice, although he may very well be right. Even if he is, people will come to distrust him and he soon loses whatever credibility he may have.

Option two is no better. Simon is just going along to be going along. He does avoid conflict, at least for the moment; but he does so totally at his expense. Even worse, people will quickly come to believe Simon does not know what he said, agreed to, or did. It is but a small step to their not believing him when he says, agrees to, or does anything. His effort to avoid conflict destroys any credibility he may have.

Using options one or two only now and then is not much better. It takes longer to lose credibility, but lose it you do. In some ways, occasional use of either option is more problematic than consistent use of either. Being unpredictable in the credibility department is harder for people to deal with than dealing with Simon The Bull-headed or Simon The Spineless.

If Simon said it, agreed to it, or did it, of course, he acknowledges the fact. If he believes he did not, then he says, "That surprises me. I must be blocking on that one. Will you help me get focus? If you will, take me back to when you are talking about. You were there so help me into the picture."

More often than you may think, the response is, "Well, I wasn't there but so-and-so told me. . . ." Other times, you are reminded the person really is right. Once in a while, you are able to see why your words or actions were interpreted differently than you intended. Whatever the outcome, you have an opportunity to reprocess and reinterpret the event. The outcome is not necessarily better; but you normally keep your credibility and your commitment to PPS intact.

Simon says, "Work with people instead of merely relying on your power and control."

That Simon, there he goes again reiterating the obvious. Working with people is certainly the right thing to do, the PPS way. Surely everyone knows this by now. They also know relying on

power and control stifles innovation, creativity, and cooperation. Further, it increases tension and apprehension while causing people to become anxious and fearful. Even if they are not the focus of the power and control, the affect is about the same. Just being in a power-oriented environment is unsettling and stressful. Simon recognizes these unacceptable outcomes; but his favoring working with people rests more specifically on the less obvious down-side of routinely using power and control.

Regularly using power and control is ineffective and counterproductive. It does not work. More specifically;

- The more skilled the employee, the less effective it is.
- The older the child, the worse the outcomes with power oriented approaches.
- The more competent the spouse, the less tolerance there is for controlling relationships.
- The more important the person's participation is to the team, the more using power and control jeopardizes the team's success.
- The more choices the person has, the less acceptance there is of such nonsense.

Is Simon's point coming clear? Unnecessary use of power and control leads to your best people leaving. What's more, if they cannot leave, they gradually shut down on you. You do not consistently get the best they have to offer.

Give this a minute's thought. The team's brightest and best either leave or perform below their best. Over time, what is the result? You have only those people who are less skilled and competent along with others who are not at their best. Now, who is left on your team and how does it bode for team success?

Simon works with people because it is the right thing to do. He only uses power and control when he has no other viable options, since he wants to maximize innovation, creativity, and cooperation. Most critical to his success, though, he passes along as much power and control as people on the team can productively and constructively manage because Simon wants Simon to succeed. Working with people who are so empowered keeps good people on the team and extends to them the opportunity to be great. Given that potential for excellence, Simon holds this secret close to his heart and never loses focus on it:

- **Power and people don't mix.**

Simon says, "Take everyone into consideration when making decisions."

Again, Simon seems to be stating the obvious. People need and deserve consideration. They want to be involved and to have their interests and points of view considered whenever decisions are made. They expect to matter and to make a difference as individuals.

These points are certainly on target. There is another level of truth here, though. On the one side, not taking everyone into consideration runs the chance of alienating those who are left out or ignored. If that happens, they become less invested in the team and less committed to its success. Odds for achieving the mission go down and Simon's leadership is weakened. It is a similar outcome to that seen when power and control are used excessively and inappropriately. Do it yourself leadership does not work, unless you really do intend to do everything yourself.

On the flip side, the decision itself is suspect. There are people who could have and should have been consulted. The people who have to deal with the affects of the decision are taken by surprise and may not be prepared to handle the consequences of the decision. The rumor mill gets a new source of fuel and confusion within the team increases. Unintended problems develop and the original decision often has to be modified to accommodate to the consequences of not taking everyone into consideration. With all this, taking everyone into consideration is not only the sensitive thing to do, it is an essential strategy for leaders who value making the right decision, the first time, on time, every time.

Related to this is trying to understand the what and why of problems before taking action. This cannot be done without taking everyone into consideration. Simply put, that is the only way to be sure you first understand the problem. Even for Super Simon, it is ordinarily impossible to handle a problem until he actually knows what the problem is.

Recall the stool with only one leg? It is a good example of the what and why of problems. That stool belonged to a team that had a take-charge leader. He knew what the problem was and how to fix it. He simply threw the piece of junk into the trash and the problem was solved.

He first observed and analyzed: that is a piece of junk. Next, he defined the problem: junk should not be left laying around. Finally, he problem solved: into the trash it went.

Did this "I know what's best for everyone," approach solve the problem? Yes, it did. Did it cause other problems? It likely

did not. Can you think of reasons why the approach might not have been appropriate? You probably can.

The issue with the approach is not so much whether it works as sometimes it does not. When it does work, which is most of the time, it goes unnoticed. When it does not work, people are upset, other problems develop, and a round of second guessing begins. If the leader is committed to doing the right things right, the first time, on time, every time, he will need to reconsider the approach.

Two points are important. First, problems seldom need an immediate, right now solution. When they do, then action must be taken; but there is normally time to at least ask a question or two. "Is there some reason why that one legged stool is just laying there? Does anyone have plans for using it? Is throwing it away going to cause anyone a problem?"

Second, and here is the most serious issue, the "I'll fix it myself without consulting with anyone approach" is habituating. The symptoms include an irritating increase in arrogance, less value being placed on other people and their contributions, increasing insensitivity to the needs and interests of others, and less focus on the team and its mission. Over time, the symptoms also include an increase in bad decisions and a decrease in problem's really getting solved. Instead of things getting better, they actually get worse; and the misguided leader does not have a clue why. He believes it is because people are causing problems instead of taking care of business.

You may hear him say, "I spend all of my time putting out fires. It is no wonder we don't make much progress. If everyone would just do what they are supposed to do, I could get things on track." Of course, he never considers the possibility his attitude and problem solving approach are, themselves, the underlying source of all those fires.

Simon says, "Make the tough or unpopular decision when necessary."

One of Simon's most challenging leadership dilemmas comes with this strategy. Simon takes everyone's ideas and points of view into consideration, gets input from those who are familiar with the problem or issue, and consults with people who may have special interest in the outcome or an important perspective. A high level of consensus develops from these activities; and it is clear what most people think he should do.

Simon then struggles with the decision, processes it through the filter of his experience and judgment, and makes the one decision no one expected or can support. Even more exasperating

for others is Simon's inability to give them an explanation for his decision they can understand or accept. They think he is wrong, believe he has made things worse, and feel betrayed. They are unhappy and now are less trusting of anything Simon says or does. "He is just going to do whatever he wants to do. He doesn't care what we think or feel. When he talks with us, he is just going through the motions. He is out of control and it does not matter what we say or do. There is no point in talking with him about anything. He won't listen to anyone."

Does Simon take the easy alternative and simply accept the advice and guidance others have provided, go with their preferred decision? If he does, few will second guess or find fault however things turn out. Additionally, he avoids the unpleasant need to deal with the "I told you so," chorus if the consequences of his decision are not what Simon expects.

If Simon goes with his decision and things work out well, he may or may not get the credit. If things are worse, Simon gets the blame, whether his decision had anything to do with it or not. Had he done what they advised, things would be fine now. It is a "damned if you do and damned if you don't" dilemma, for sure.

Simon's dilemma is at the heart of leadership. When should he defer to the collective wisdom of others and when should he go with his personal best judgment, given what he knows at the time? His solution is fairly simple, as it turns out. He always goes with the collective wisdom of others unless he believes very strongly they are wrong. It is not enough to believe he is right. He has to also believe they are wrong. Having made that decision, he may still go with the collective wisdom if he believes the consequences will not be excessively problematic or can be reversed, if necessary. They might be right; and even if they are not, their empowerment entitles them to their turn at bat, so to speak.

On those few occasions when Simon believes he is right and others are wrong and the consequences of going with their recommendations would be very negative and not reversible, Simon does what he has to do. He has only one responsible choice. He can handle people's being unhappy or upset with him at times. He can not accept his failing to do what he knows needs done. Even more to the point, he could not accept his failing to lead.

- A leader leads; and if he caves-in when the heat gets turned up, it is time for him to pass the torch along to a more legitimate leader.

Well, okay. Simon did not invent the idea. "If you can't stand the heat, get out of the Kitchen." Thank you Mr. President.

Simon says, "Attend to the details without getting bogged down in them."

"The devil is in the details." That is Simon's only point here. What can be missed is the fact this devil is particularly devilish. Every situation, set of circumstances, problem, or issue has its broad-brush look and feel. From that perspective, it takes on its special definition. Given that definition, Simon can draw on his insight and experience and take appropriate action. He does not need the details to know what to do. In fact, he is so oriented to managing people and processes at this level he quickly becomes impatient with those who insist on providing far more detail than Simon wants or needs.

Less successful leaders take a different approach. They want and need every detail, no matter how trivial. They believe the more information they have, the better will be their choices and decisions. These leaders see themselves as thoughtful and thorough. People like Simon are, they think, impulsive and inclined to shoot from the hip.

Here is the underlying problem. No matter how much detailed information leaders have, there is most always more information that could be made available, if they are patient enough. There are also things they cannot know and details that will not be forthcoming no matter how patient they are. It is normally possible to know more and impossible to know everything.

Leaders always act based on partial information. The challenge is knowing when to act and when to wait on more detail. Were that not enough, information tends to go down in proportion to the potential unwanted consequences of the decision or choice. The more potential there is for bad outcomes, the less well-informed the leader is likely to be. In these situations, successful leaders tend to act too quickly and less successful leaders tend to get bogged down in the details and postpone action indefinitely.

Understanding these facts of leadership, Simon counsels wisely: Attend to the details without getting bogged down in them. If you are apt to act too quickly, slow down and assimilate more detail. If instead, you are apt to obsess over the details, take a deep breath and act. Either way, you may want to use Simon's secret technique. He sets a specific, future time to decide. This forces him to consider more detail and to get more input. It also forces a closure to input and an end point for attending to detail. When the time comes to decide, he decides. As Simon puts it, "When the bell rings, you just jump on the bull and hope you can hang on."

Simon says, "Give people clear, frequent, and accurate feedback."

This unusually complex strategy starts with being as quick to tell people what they have done right as you are to tell them what they have done wrong. That does not sound difficult, does it? What if the order is reversed, though? Be as quick to tell people what they have done wrong as you are to tell them what they have done right. Now it sounds odd. It seems like Simon is suggesting equal attention needs to be given to both "what's right" and "what's wrong." There you go. That is exactly the point.

It is not necessary to go into a lot of detail about leaders who only relate to team members in terms of problems and things they have done wrong. They also point fingers and know every problem is someone else's fault. Their major activity is finding someone, anyone to criticize or blame. You are also well-aware of leaders who appropriately point out problems but seldom point out good work. It is not unusual to see the compliment/criticism balance favoring criticism. Simon certainly recommends leaders carefully attend to keeping the balance in balance.

For Simon, finding and keeping the balance is based on taking it for granted people are trying to do a good job. They do not intentionally screw things up, make mistakes, or perform below their abilities. Even more, most everyone on the team consciously and intentionally gives the little extra moving good work into the excellent category. Their commitment to excellence is a major reason why they are on the team; and excellence is what you get from them, the first time, on time, every time.

Here is the rub. With highly successful teams, the expectation is team members perform at the excellent level every time, no exceptions, no excuses. People are extraordinarily good at what they do. With teams like this, compliments and praise are plentiful and lavish. Even when people are not being complimented directly, they receive indirect compliments and praise from customers and others in the external environment. They are among the best and they know it. It helps to attend to direct praise and acknowledgment of superior performance; but this is merely an extra quality touch in an already self-reinforcing environment. If a team is not doing well, compliments and praise will not, by themselves, help much. If it is doing well, additional praise and compliments will not add much to its success.

The real issue here is criticism. Of course, Simon praises publicly and only criticizes in private. He also is very careful to assure his criticism is an exact fit with the problem or issue, not overdoing it or under doing it. Criticism, no matter how well it is managed, introduces a negative element into a fast-moving, stressful environment where people are already on

edge and pushing themselves to their limits. The affect is the person who is criticized and those who are coincidentally in the immediate environment become apprehensive and less productive, at least for the moment. The point is criticism is always temporarily counterproductive. For this reason, Simon is quick to praise but very cautious when criticizing anyone, for any reason.

Clear, accurate, and frequent feedback is certainly important. Simon knows as well providing constructive and effective criticism is the most delicate area of the feedback balancing act. If this feedback is inappropriate or excessive, the person will overreact or withdraw and the outcome is often worse than the original problem. If criticism is not forthcoming when it is appropriate or is not focused enough, the problem or issue persists and likely will get worse. Getting criticism just right, the first time, on time, every time is critical for any leader and an essential ingredient of a winning team.

As if the challenge of getting criticism right, the first time, on time, every time were not enough by itself, there is an additional dimension further complicating the matter. The standards increase. Yesterday's acceptable performance levels are under continuous review and may not be acceptable today. Team members who have performed adequately in the past may have the same quality of work criticized and judged unacceptable. They find they have shifted from valued team members to people who are marginal performers. At a minimum, the bar is constantly being raised and higher levels of performance are expected. The unavoidable but possible result is a member has to leave the team. If this happens, other members then become anxious about whether they might be next. Because of this anxiety, any criticism must be managed very carefully and judiciously.

The major implication of all of this is a successful leader must be a very good teacher. Further, all incidents or situations potentially leading to criticism must be redefined as teaching opportunities. As Simon puts it,

- "Good leaders never criticize. It is just too dangerous. Instead, they know how and when to teach and are careful to never miss a teaching opportunity."

The key here is in understanding the nature of the teaching opportunities. Simon is not referring to training needs prompted by team members' needing skills they do not have or enhancements of existing skills. You know Simon values this type of training and it is normal and expected for all team members.

The most common prompt for these types of teaching opportunities stems from an inadequacy in work or work performance. The team member is just not up to the expected level in one or more areas. Dealing with this is fairly easy. Simply

sit with the team member to discuss the inadequacies and to develop a mutually agreed on plan for correcting them. This may mean more training, more attention to detail, connecting with a mentor, or anything else getting the valued team member from here to there. Set specific dates for activities, for evaluation of progress, as well as for having the deficiency corrected. As you can see, it is simply another application of Simon's usual problem solving strategy.

The more serious challenge comes when the team member either cannot or will not do what is expected or continues unacceptable behavior after having been warned. First, there must not be any delay. It is unfair to the member to put off confronting the issue. Further, avoiding doing what needs done gives the member the impression there is no problem. Do today's business today, even if it is uncomfortable or potentially unpleasant. If you need additional incentive, the task will become even more uncomfortable and unpleasant if you postpone it till tomorrow.

When you do confront the issue, Simon has a suggestion. Say, "My problem is. . . . (Be quite specific.) You either will not or cannot do what I expect. If you can't, we will talk about that. If you will not, there is nothing to discuss further. You cannot remain on the team. Is it can't or won't?" If the team member feels capable, develop a plan to correct the problem. If the member feels incapable, reassign the team member to other responsibilities, if possible. If the member has to leave the team, make the arrangements to do that, giving as much consideration to the individual's needs and circumstances as you can. You are still dealing with a valued person, even though team membership is terminated. People in this situation are entitled to the same level of humanity and respectful treatment as they received while they were being recruited for the team. The PPS basics still apply every day, every time, with everyone, no exceptions, no excuses.