

LEADERSHIP, REDEFINED

By John Salustri

The dictionary doesn't tell us much about leadership. "The action of leading a group of people or an organization," doesn't really cover any ground at all, and certainly doesn't begin to approach the highly nuanced, transformative, and frankly humbling experience that leadership really is. That is, when it's done right.

The key words there are 'transformative' and 'humbling', because as the two leaders we spoke with (and you're familiar with both of them) told us, their leadership of SIOR has had as much of an impact on them as it did on the advancement of the association.

Manager or Leader?

First, let's get something straight. Leadership and management are two different pastimes. "The manager's job is to plan and organize, while the leader's job is to inspire and motivate." So says SIOR Immediate Past President Geoffrey Kasselmann, SIOR.

"As a leader," adds Past President Allen Gump, SIOR, "you're trying to move things in a certain direction, but you can do it only with buy-in. You can't push the organization just because you think it's the right thing."

Both men agree that this buy-in is not only critical, it does in fact lead the leader. "When you lead an organization of this size and caliber of people you learn very quickly that you're not the smartest guy in the room," says Gump. "You're reminded that there's a lot of brainpower here, and this might sound cheesy, but it's true that you're humbled that you're leading an organization of some of the smartest and most creative people around."

You discover, he says, that, "as hard as it is for any of us to admit, I may not be right all the time. As a leader it's your job to bring that right decision out and let them come to whatever that conclusion is. The leader provides guidance and facilitates that."

And if you've ever talked with Gump about the nature of leadership, you've also learned something very quickly, that he aspires to the concept of servant leadership, taking a back seat while in the lead chair. As defined by movement founder Robert K. Greenleaf, the servant leader "is servant first."

And that's a clear check on ego, not an easy task in commercial real estate. Kasselmann says his tenure as president "has changed me a great deal. I'm much more humble. It's such an honor to be the leader and brand ambassador.

But rather than using the platform to advance a personal agenda, no matter how well-intended, the listening aspect of this position has definitely shaped a good amount of my thinking on leadership."

What Generation Gap?

One might believe that one of the biggest challenges of leadership today is herding very different generational mindsets, especially given all that has been written about millennials--as if they were specimens under glass. You'd be wrong.

"Even millennials like to point out that all the stuff that's said about them isn't right," says Kasselmann. "One style of management doesn't fit everyone on the team. You can't use yesterday's analog tools to achieve tomorrow's digital results. The nature of leadership has to change in both predictable and unpredictable ways, and it requires an investment of your time to keenly understand your audience."

"Everybody throws millennials into the same bucket as if they're all this or that," adds Gump. "But the differences aren't as big as they're made out to be. If anything, millennials are just as interested in getting involved and giving back."

A New Can of Terms

Both men see their time in governance as transformative, both for SIOR and for themselves, helping them to redefine their notion of leadership. In terms of SIOR, they see as a major achievement the 2015 creation of the new long-term strategic plan, which was intended to secure SIOR's viability and prominence as far into the future as possible. The creation of the plan took place during the tenure of past president Angela West, SIOR. A part of that initiative was the governance restructuring, says Gump, who led that effort. It was a complex task, a labor of love, he calls it, and he believes it made SIOR "more nimble, responsive, and streamlined."

In terms of redefining their own views of leadership, Kasselmann puts a greater sense of collaboration at the top of the list. "Getting maximum engagement from our volunteer leaders and ensuring that collaboration really does take place helps manage risk and moves the organization, when the majority of the organization wants to go in that direction."

Linked to that, Kasselmann says he learned to be a better delegator. "Better listening, better collaboration, and better delegating are all a direct result of my leadership time at SIOR. Letting go sometimes is hard. Yet, in this role letting go is the only thing you can do. I've

learned that people challenged in that positive way will rise and deliver, often with remarkable results that eclipse what you might have done on your own."

For Gump, it seems that there is a greater appreciation of the work of others. "When we restructured governance, it took a massive effort, not only by the committee members--who were fantastic--but by the entire board, which had to agree to significant changes from the old ways of doing things. A lot of great input came from everyone. Seeing everyone come together regardless of how it impacted them personally showed real leadership by the entire board."

Paying It Forward

So with all of this experience in their back pocket, what advice would they give to current SIOR Global President Del Markward, SIOR? "Del doesn't need any advice from me," says Gump. "In addition to being a damn brilliant guy, no one reads the pulse of the organization better than Del." In fact, he says that the upcoming slate of leaders has him very excited, projecting ahead to the presidencies of Robert Thornburgh, SIOR, and Mark Duclos, SIOR. He calls all of them "three of the most dedicated people I've ever seen."

Kasselmann, however, takes up the challenge. "First, remember that as

president you speak for an entire organization, not just for yourself. There'll be plenty of times when the organization wants to say one thing and you want to say something different. The organization always wins.

"The second thing is to make like a sponge and absorb. The year as president goes by very fast and it's an intensive but highly-rewarding position."

Finally, "Don't take your eye off your business ball. You need to strike a balance between business, family and SIOR. A happy SIOR is a better leader and a happy family makes a happy SIOR. You're serving multiple masters at the same time."

Gump agrees that striking the right balance is important. He adds that, despite the complexities and subtleties of the position, there is one certainty. "You'll be in with people who put themselves second and SIOR first." That's great news for any leader. ♡

CONTRIBUTING SIORS



Geoffrey Kasselmann, SIOR



Allen Gump, SIOR

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