

What's *Our* Story? - Part IV

Captain David Marquet USN (Ret) 60th Anniversary Keynote Speaker

In honor of the 60th Anniversary of The Employers' Association, retired Navy Captain and national speaker David Marquet has been invited to give the keynote speech for the Annual Meeting on Wednesday, May 19th. He will also conduct a second, more in-depth seminar later that same day. David Marquet is a proven practitioner and innovative thinker of the submarine force. A top graduate from the US Naval Academy, he commanded the nuclear-powered fast-attack submarine USS Santa Fe, stationed in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Captain Marquet completely turned around USS Santa Fe, where the crew went from being "worst to first."

In anticipation of Captain Marquet's keynote, we thought it might be interesting to get his perspective on the keys to long-term success as well as several leadership issues.

Jack: This year the Employers' Association will celebrate 60 years of service to this community. What do you think are the keys to long-term success and sustainability for any organization?

David: Jack, as you well know the business environment and challenges facing employers are very different today than when the Employers' Association was founded. If your organization were providing the same services and courses as it did then, you'd have become obsolete long ago. It's possible that the Employers' Association benefitted from a series of especially prescient forecasters but when you see sustained success over many decades it's more likely that the source was leadership – in that the collective talents of the people in the organization were allowed to shine through. In this sense, the "goodness of the organization" lives in the people and guiding principles as opposed to a single individual. Setting up a leadership structure that allows full intellectual, emotional, and creative energy of the employees is the best way for an organization to have long-term success.

Jack: What do you think is the single most important characteristic of good leadership? Why is it so important? Why is it so hard to do or is it?

David: In my view of the world, good leadership means more than simply having a well running or well performing organization. It means having a well performing organization whose performance endures beyond the tenure of any particular leader, as in the case of the Employers' Association. In other words, the performance of the organization is decoupled from the performance of the leader and lives in the people. Good leadership also results in spawning many additional leaders from within the organization. So, if your test for good leadership includes these two factors in addition to having a well running organization, then some of the standard characteristics that we've adopted in the West fall away.

So, think about that –we are going to judge your leadership ability on things that happen 5 or 10 years after you leave an organization. This long-term performance only happens when the leader is fully dedicated to making sure he or she is not the source of organizational performance – but that the people and structures of the organization are.

Jack: The EA tag line is People and Performance. In your experience, what is the most important thing a Leader can do to improve Performance?

David: Allow your people to operate at 100% mental capacity! Notice I didn't say "encourage" or "motivate" there. In the industrial age, most employees were hired for their mechanical abilities. The measure of an effective operation was running your factory at 100% capacity without down time.

Employers could easily assess how their people were doing simply by looking at them. Bosses could see physical movements. In the information age, the role of employees [and by extension, employers] has changed in ways we are just starting to understand but I don't think it's premature to say that the intellectual capacity of your people has grown in importance relative to the physical. So, again, it goes to this question – what is the best leadership model to allow my people to fully tap their intellectual juices? It is likely not going to be the command and control/leader-follower model of the industrial age because while I could coerce physical labor, and had easy ways to measure whether a laborer was slacking off, intellectual work is a very different beast.