MARKET REPORT

A Ghostly Gold Christmas

DECEMBER 21, 2006

What is it that we can learn from Ghosts, Gold, and Christmas that can help make you a leader in your company and community? By using "The Gold Standards" of Leadership, we can see how decision-making abilities can help achieve peak performance.

A Christmas Carol in Prose, Being a Ghost Story of Christmas is the full title of the well-known novel written by Charles Dickens and published and released, December 19, 1843. It is one of the all-time classics—one of the most beloved novels ever penned. It's about Ebenezer Scrooge, a miser, financier and money-changer who only thinks of wealth, with only contempt for all else, including friendship, love and the Christmas season. Scrooge, crafty, shrewd and cynical, of importance in his community—certainly. Scrooge, although extremely successful in business, service minded, charitable, a leader in his community?—certainly not!

And what of the other characters in this Christmas saga? Jacob Marley, dead for exactly 7 years on Christmas Eve, Scrooge's former partner, but who visits Scrooge as a ghost who has found the error of his ways, albeit too late. Bob Cratchit, Scrooge's employee who withstands verbal abuse and the stinginess of Scrooge as his reward while he tries to care for his family, including Tiny Tim, a cripple who needs more help than Cratchit can give.

Then, there is The Ghost of Christmas Past, who is but one of three ghosts that visits Scrooge on Christmas Eve as foretold by the ghost of Marley. This spirit leads Scrooge on a journey to remember some of the happiest times, as well as the saddest moments in his experience. These are painful memories for Scrooge, ones that he doesn't deal with very well.

The Ghost of Christmas Present reveals the happy, yet meager existence that the Cratchits live through. It's noted that although Tiny Tim is upbeat and of sweet nature, there is a strong possibility that he may not see yet another Christmas—unless changes are made to the present. Further, two destitute children are revealed to Scrooge, signifying want and ignorance, with the latter being especially detrimental.

The third ghost, the most frightening of all, allows Scrooge to see the Cratchit family without Tiny Tim, as well as a view of Scrooge's own death, celebrated by many, grieved by—well, no one! However, The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come gives Scrooge hope that as long as there is change, both Tiny Tim's fate as well as his may be altered. In fact, in an abrupt turn-around, Scrooge does a 180 (he may have even done a few 360's as well) and becomes polite, generous, kind-hearted and service oriented as never before. One can only assume that both business and personal lifestyles improve greatly as a

result.

How then can we apply the lessons learned from this wonderful tale to both our personal and business lives? Let's see where a Ghostly Gold Christmas leads us.

First, it seems that Scrooge's business did well due to the fact that he had little to no competition. I'm sure that's not true with your business however. But with fewer than 20% of organizations consistently performing above average, you have a real shot to lead your company past most all of the competition, encouraging positive approaches to change in order to achieve peak performance.

By using "The Gold Standards" of Leadership, (Scrooge would have approved if only because it involved gold) we can see how a leaders' decision-making abilities can help achieve peak performance.

Managing Time: No one was better at managing time than the three ghosts who visited Scrooge all in one night. They not only helped show Scrooge his past, both what little he had done right as well as what he had done wrong, they followed that up with a good hard look at the present and what might happen if changes were made—or not.

How do you manage your time? Do you analyze what has been happening at your property? Look at what has gone wrong—make changes, and look at what has been right and make sure you use your time to your advantage and strengthen each positive opportunity.

Enhance Communications: Scrooge only communicated from the top down. His word was authority, and everyone that did business with him, borrowed from him or worked for him cowered under his demands. In short, that's a lousy way to win friends and influence people.

Instead, make sure your organization communicates from the bottom up as well as from the top down. It must be a two-way street. Be sure departments communicate with each other to help coordinate events and make sure everyone is on the "same page." And make sure individuals communicate with each other. People should not be seen and not heard. There should be feedback and ideas offered back and forth in order to strengthen the organization and allow everyone to build towards success.

Build Trust: The Ghost of Christmas Past instilled trust in a very skeptical Scrooge. In order to be able to step out of the bedroom window into the dark night air, Scrooge had to trust that he wouldn't fall to his death. And later, when Scrooge awoke Christmas morning, he instilled trust in a child passing by, saying he would pay him handsomely if only he were to get the prize turkey from the local market to Bob Cratchit's house.

Building trust is easy. Simply put, you do what you say you will do—every time! Building trust means that your subordinates, your peers as well as your superiors know that you will deliver with whatever you are dealing with. If you are fighting for a raise for someone who has done an outstanding job, or are recommending that an employee be terminated for continuous poor performance, everyone around you will learn to trust that you will be fair and consistent—and build trust.

Maximize Influence: Marley maximized influence when he explained to Scrooge that he was forging an even heavier chain to carry through life and beyond than Marley had made for himself. Scrooge too, would be condemned to walk the earth in penitence bearing this great weight of chain as he had shown no concern for mankind during his life.

Scrooge later learned to maximize influence when he enabled Tiny Tim to be cured. Through understanding, benevolence and caring, Scrooge influenced the outcome of Tiny Tim's disease, enabling Tim to walk and live.

As a leader, you can certainly maximize influence by showing care and concern for all around you, whether at work or in your personal life. If you can pave the way and make some road easier to travel, why not do so? It will pay in dedication and respect. Leaders must not do only what is good for business, they must also do what is right—that for the good of mankind.

Facilitate Engagement: All three Christmas ghosts helped to facilitate engagement for Scrooge to see how his past affected his present and future. They enabled Scrooge to see and feel how the real world really was, and not just see Scrooge's world. All three ghosts lead Scrooge to places he could never have gone by himself.

As a leader in your organization, how can you best encourage staff to make a difference in their work style and ethic? You must enable them through training and education, giving them the confidence to become fully engaged in their next opportunity. Guide them and encourage them to become totally involved. After all, there is no room in your organization for want and ignorance.

Achieving Goals: Upon becoming "reborn," Scrooge found that he was able to lead himself and others towards goals that were unachievable in his prior life. With only the goal of monetary wealth being met, Scrooge could not even be considered a leader. However, by improving the well-being of Bob Cratchit and his family, by aiding Tiny Tim to become healthy and by showing love for his nephew Fred and his wife, Scrooge met many goals. It was said that he became as good a person as ever there was.

As a leader, you must be able to reach intended goals. Merely leading, while not achieving goals is akin to charging forward with no path to follow and no hope of reaching your goal. It is best to have both short term and long term goals in sight. When leading people towards a goal, it is good to be able to put a few short term goals "under your belt" in order to keep morale and enthusiasm up while striving to reach your long term goals.

At HVS/The Ference Group, we can help you to develop The Gold Standards of Leadership. To reach peak performance, effective leaders make decisions keeping each success point in mind. Unlike Scrooge, you won't have help from ghosts or be able to revisit the past in order to see the present and change the future.

Instead, our approach will help by aligning action plans to strategies, tactics and time frames in order for you to know how best to stage, run and sustain change initiatives.

As Scrooge would say, trying to lead in any other way would be a, "Bah, Humbug!"

Additional articles can be found in our management library.[www.theferencegroup.com]

For more information regarding development programs, contact, Gene Ference, President, HVS/The Ference Group. []

HVS/The Ference Group provides programs in TeamStrategics: organizational development, business health assessments, and strategic planning. Our clients include successful applicants for the *Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award*, *Employer of Choice*, *Best Human Resources*, *Employer of the Year*, *Fortune 100 Best Companies to Work For* as well as quality of work life and service culture awards of Great Britain, Mexico, Brazil, Australia, The Netherlands and Singapore.