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BUSINESS

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Young leaders: Learn from this letter



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I have a wide range of musical interests. Depending on my mood, I enjoy classical, hard and soft rock, country and almost everything in between.

Recently, I've had Brad Paisley's "Letter to Me" stuck in my head. Released in 2007, it's a clever tune in which Paisley offers advice to himself as a 17-year-old.

That got me to thinking about what advice I would offer to myself as a new, 27-year-old manager. Like Paisley's song, I hope the next generation can benefit. Here goes:

First of all, congratulations. Senior leaders didn't simply pull your name out of a hat. They recognized that you possess some unique skills in leading and managing people. Your age was certainly discussed, and the risks associated with it were determined to be manageable.

That said, don't feel too good about yourself. You're no better or worse than anyone else on the team ... just different. You're simply being directed to the right seat on the bus for you to fulfill the organization's mission.

I understand that it's a bit intimidating managing former co-workers, some of whom have been working here longer than you've been alive. Heck, Roger helped you get started, and now it sometimes feels like assigning jobs to your parents.

But you don't need to apologize for the situation. Most of the older workers figured out years ago that they either didn't possess the skills or the desire to manage others. They just want to do a good job focusing on the technical aspects of the job, not worrying about others. And besides, they also recognize that you've got leadership skills.

Oh, and about the technical aspects of the job. Realize that you will sacrifice technical skills with this change. But let's be honest. You were a good engineer with potential to be very good. But you were never going to become a great engineer (that "knowledge" from advanced math and control theory courses never really survived past the required final exam, did it?).

Your age won't be a major detriment to success. Most of what you need to know about working with people, you learned from Mom and Dad. That time you had to lead that ragtag patrol of Boy Scouts to build a fire in a steady downpour in order to eat taught you teamwork.

In fact, your management style won't change dramatically with age. Sure, you'll have a few more experiences to draw upon, increasing your confidence. You'll mellow a bit, become a bit more patient. You'll listen better and longer before talking. The sooner you develop those traits, the better.

Continue to invest in deep, meaningful relationships with a handful of older employees you respect, including leaders. Their perspective will put things into context during tough times. And there will be tough times.

Your youth can be a real asset.

Similar to investing, many managers tend to get more conservative with age. They perceive that they have more to lose and so they unintentionally play not to lose. Play to win!

Oh, and here's an "Aha!" moment that you'll have in about 20 years. I might as well share it with you now so you have an additional two decades of benefit: It's not about delivering great results ... it's about developing people and a place where great results can be consistently delivered.

Along that line, like so many American managers, you want to solve problems quickly and directly. When you see something that works for another organization, you can't wait to duplicate it. But don't copy the tool; instead replicate the problem solving process that developed the tool. That way you'll have a solution that better fits your specific problem and situation, plus you'll be developing problem solving employees.

Finally, and most important, remember this isn't even your most important job. Be a good spouse and parent first. You only get one chance to raise your kids. You won't regret it.

RICK SAYS

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BIZ LOCAL

DUPACO RATED 'TOP PERFORMING'

Dupaco Community Credit Union was rated as one of the 10 "top performing" credit unions in the country, based on last year's performance, according to a company news release.

Raddon Financial Group presented the Crystal Performance Award to Dupaco. The award recognizes credit unions with a top 10 ranking based on the RFG

Performance Index, a measurement of growth, income, efficiency and margin management, the release states. More than 350 credit unions participate in RFG's CEO Strategies group research program.

CARTEGRAPH PURCHASES GOVPARTNER

Cartegraph Systems Inc. announced it recently acquired GovPartner, a company

specializing in community development software for the public sector, located in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Former GovPartner employees joining Cartegraph include: Brian Brittain, software engineer; Doug Brown, product manager; Jamie Wipperman, senior project manager; Kevin Hasler, systems engineer; Kevin Vincent, enterprise sales executive; Tammy Woods, software engineer and Tim Halterman, software engineer.