

The Leadership Secrets of Santa Claus **by Eric Harvey, David Cottrell, and Al Lucia.** **Dallas: Walk the Talk, 2003.**

Reviewed by Louis Mazé

Louis Mazé is a staff development officer in Human & Organizational Development at Texas State Technical College System.

You know, as a kid I always used to wonder how Santa got it all done in a night: all those presents on one sleigh, all those tired reindeer, all those houses . . . so many tasks, so few resources, so little time.

Well, here with the answers – finally! – is a slim volume that makes an excellent read at this time of year, *The Leadership Secrets of Santa Claus*. The book and lots of other useful resources are available at www.santasecrets.com.

Apparently, Santa on his rounds has been impressed by the success of all those best-selling business volumes he came across: *Who Moved My Cheese?*, *Fish!*, *The Seven Habits*, and so on.

“Hey, why not get on the band sleigh?” he said to himself, and he started analyzing just how his own monumental annual task managed to get done so efficiently. The result might also have been titled *The Eight Features of Highly Effective Organizations*. Santa, in consultation with the other members of his team, boiled the recipe for success down to these “secrets,” which any organization can and must pay attention to:

1. Build a Wonderful Workshop
2. Choose Your Reindeer Wisely
3. Make a List and Check it Twice
4. Listen to the Elves
5. Get Beyond the Red Wagons
6. Share the Milk and Cookies
7. Find Out Who’s Been Naughty and Nice
8. Be Good for Goodness Sake

I think you can see where Santa’s going with this, and why he thinks other outfits could benefit from knowing these essentials. I’ll bet you can also see how, once you replace a word like, say, “elves” with “employees,” these would apply to our very own operations here at TSTC.

Take number one, for example, “Build a Wonderful Workshop.” Santa realized that nothing was going to work if everyone didn’t understand what the Big Picture was. What’s our mission? How do I need to treat my people to achieve that mission? What are our values and how can sticking to them help us accomplish the mission?

And how 'bout them reindeer, eh, in number two? Bring in only the best, and you won't have nearly as many problems getting them to perform. Once you've brought them on, it's all about finding where they fit best to pull that sleigh. And by golly, when they perform, you reward 'em! And if they show the ability to move up to another position in the reindeer team, move 'em on up there – but only if they show that potential! Oh and by the way, make sure you get a good mix of reindeer out there

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in front of your vehicle, because each position takes different kinds of abilities, personalities and experience, and it's that mix that makes it all work – that creates a real team, in fact. (And any of you who have ever driven a team of horses know that Santa's right about that!)

I'm sure you're with Santa on number three: get organized (today, not tomorrow!), follow the plan you worked out, and use all available resources wisely.

And as for number four, “Listen to the Elves,” you're way ahead of us here – you know who the “elves” are: get your employees' – and co-workers' – feedback, be aware of how you look to them (ask yourself what kind of example you're setting), and feel their pain – walk a mile or two in their shoes!

“Get Beyond the Red Wagons” may need a little explanation, but any of you who have had to buy presents for kids who are too old to be happy with the traditional little kid presents know what Santa means here: change happens, so deal with it – and help the kids deal with it! Helping your co-workers accept the reality of change and maybe even get into it – now that's a gift! And another lesson here from Santa: it's the customer who's in charge.

There's more, of course, but I'm limited to a certain number of words here, just like on a term paper, and I've got to get it in the mail before Christmas, so on Donner, on Blitzen, to number sixen! Namely, “Share the Milk and Cookies!” I do believe Santa's talking about employee recognition here – recognizing the difference employees make, rewarding them for outstanding performance, and being creative about recognition!

As for number seven, “Find Out Who's Been Naughty and Nice,” well, if you've brought in the right reindeer, you may not have to work so hard at this one, but no one's perfect, and the lesson here is that imperfections in the enterprise ought to be met head on. At the other extreme, the “nice” end of the scale, “don't forget the superstars” is the moral: if you take them for granted, you may not have them around long, because they're in demand! But what about all the folks in the middle? Well, use coaching and positive reinforcement, all with a view toward making stars out of all of us.

And that last one? It's about leading by example, setting guidelines and accountability, and remembering that everything, but everything, counts in achieving success. Those are Santa's guidelines for his own performance – administrators take heed! After all, your elves are watching you!

Well, there's lots more in this slim volume. It's an absorbing, fun read and I recommend it to all TSTCers, reindeer, elves and Santas! And now I can't wait for that other book to appear . . . Mrs. Santa's version!

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