



## **Watch Your Tracks** **By Dr. Jim Beaubien**

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As a child, I frequently accompanied my father on the rounds of his trap line. Looking back on these experiences, I marvel at his ability to read the tracks. Tracks provided him with information about an animal's size, direction, speed and condition. He taught me that everything leaves tracks. You just have to know what to look for.

Lessons learned as a child on the trap line now apply directly to my work as a leadership consultant. As leaders move about in organizations, they also leave tracks. These tracks provide information about the their stature, direction, speed and condition. You just have to know what to look for.

Let me give you an example that's fresh in my mind. I recently conducted a leadership seminar for a group of health care managers. The seminar was held at a youth centre that rents its facilities to generate extra income. All of the seminar participants were extremely impressed with the quality of service provided at the centre and the leadership within the youth organization became a topic of discussion in our seminar.

Leadership has clearly left its imprints on the centre and its people. Here are some of the tracks (results) we collectively observed.

Employees at the centre were glad to have us and openly showed their appreciation for our business. There was nothing fancy, nothing contrived, just a genuine and warm approach that made everyone feel welcome.

The executive director of the centre asked for time at the beginning of our program to introduce everyone to the site. He skillfully wove in the organization's vision and explained how our patronage was contributing to their goal of developing youth. He displayed an obvious sense of pride in the organization's past accomplishments and future promise. His brief presentation was appreciated and seen as 'value added' by all of the seminar participants.

The cook was away but we were not left hungry. The office manager and a maintenance man happily pitched in and helped with kitchen duties. There was a lot of teasing and laughing about the maintenance man's specialty being gravy. Once meals were served, they went back to their regular duties. Teamwork appeared to be the norm.

They delivered. They were equipped and prepared to run seminars. Flip chart paper, pens, masking tape, and related supplies were stocked close at hand. The food service was excellent. Throughout the day, staff was attentive and provided us with everything we needed.

Staff were happy and glad to be there.

From these tracks we discerned the following about the approach, condition and stature of leadership in this organization:

**Vision:** Leadership has helped employees and volunteers crystallize a clear and compelling sense of the future. They know what they intend to become and they share a noble dream.

**Mission:** The organization has a clear sense of purpose. Its focus on youth development is clear. Although we could not tell from the tracks, we sensed the mission is supported by a clear set of goals.

**Values:** Leadership has established a clear framework for the values which guide the employees' behavior. This is not an organization that gives lip service to its values; everyone lives them.

**Teamwork:** Leadership supports teamwork. People are willing step into another's role and do whatever it takes to get the job done.

**Reinforcement:** Leadership focuses on recognizing and reinforcing positive behavior. The playfully productive tone and the willingness to go the extra mile are characteristics of organizations with supportive and empowering leaders. (Negative leadership results in dispirited employees who do just enough to get by).

Although it's a long way from a trap line to a leadership training session, tracks are tracks. Check yours. What do they say about your approach, condition and stature as a leader?

My Dad's lesson still applies - you just have to know what to look for.