

Who Mike DuBose Really Is!

September 1, 2007

A Letter Mike sent to his staff

Every couple of years, I think it's important for everyone (especially leaders) to step outside their comfort zone and box, look into the mirror, and ask: *"Who am I? What do I like and dislike about myself? How can I improve and grow? What do I need to let others know about me so they understand me?"*

By understanding ourselves and one another, we work together better as a team. The following are some thoughts on how I see myself and how I perceive the companies we're a part of:

- 1- I see our companies as powerful trains that are bigger than any one individual. At times, we need to stop the train; inspect all components; get everyone off; look at the tracks ahead; and then come to consensus on where we are going. Then, we fire up the train again! My job, as president, is to keep the train moving at a good speed in the right direction. I have experimented with different leadership models, but now I subscribe to the servant leadership model. I essentially see myself working for you!
- 2- While being president and owner of the companies gives me the authority to make the final decision, I do **not** like to use that power unless I have to. When people refer to me as "their boss," I am uncomfortable with this designation—I think it is insulting because it's evident that I've failed in the way I want staff to perceive me. I dislike leaders whose philosophy is *"My way or the highway!"* I will lay down the law if I have to, but I like consensus building and *"win-win"* approaches. I like to gather facts from differing sources and then make prompt and timely decisions. Once I make a decision, I will not waiver unless new information comes in. If I find a decision is faulty, I will quickly alter course.
- 3- I believe in seeking advice from accounting, legal, human resource, professional development, planning, and insurance experts.
- 4- Reaching consensus is very important to me. I look for middle-of-the-road decisions where the majority agrees. I will speak my mind and push my positions at times (especially when I feel like the company is threatened), but I do not like "Yes men/women" or for people to agree with me just for the sake of agreeing with the person in charge. As General George Patton said: *"If everyone is thinking alike, someone is not thinking!"* I think it's always best for people to speak their minds in a respectful and friendly way.
- 5- I am a **very** curious person who likes out-of-the-box, innovative, nontraditional, and creative approaches toward planning for the future and problem solving. Consequently, I see idea sharing working like a tennis match where the ball is lobbed back and forth on the court. It takes several lobs before you score a victory! It's important to know that if you throw an idea my way, you may get ten more ideas back.
- 6- I think out loud pretty often. Just because I share my thoughts verbally, it doesn't necessarily mean that I am sold on those ideas or that I will implement them. I float various positions to start a dialog. Once I communicate an idea

(during the thinking-out-loud phase), I will then study the ideas for a time. I step outside my box and critically look at the situation from different positions (legal, company threats, financial, ethical) and perspectives (customers, community, God, vendors, staff). Days or sometimes a week later, I will revisit the different thoughts and even criticize my own work or ideas. We all see things differently, and no one person has all the answers. Therefore, when you get a lot of suggestions from me during the initial stages of a new project, etc., try to recognize that my suggestions are just my way of getting the creative juices flowing in an attempt to spur the ideas and thoughts of others. Don't let my actions slow down or interfere with your own thoughts or planning. I don't like to get all my way – just give me what works, regardless who thought of it. And, if does not work, I want to know why.

- 7- I don't like to work with rigid, inflexible folks. I love to work with self-directed people who stay a step ahead of me. I don't like to have to remind staff about something I have asked for (even though you have to remind me sometimes!). I work best and am most excited about my work when I can throw out an idea, and folks ask for my input, pick up the project, and run with it with minimal handholding and supervision. Then, I like to be kept informed as the project progresses.
- 8- When I send out ideas (remember, I think out loud), I don't like a quick reaction, prompt response, or immediate feedback unless I ask for it. I like for people to take a few days to think about my ideas and then feel free to ask me: "*What are you thinking?*" Keep in mind that I may change positions a few days later. However, once I make a decision, I don't usually waiver unless new information surfaces that provides a better point of view.
- 9- I expect staff to examine my ideas in terms of pros and cons and combine my thoughts with their own, creating "our" ideas. One of my big turn-off's is to have a staff member tell me what cannot work or to speak in negative, defeatist terms. With these folks, I can shut down or even worse, become a micromanager and then demand my way. What pleases me most is to have staff diplomatically debate issues by saying: "*I like this or that and can use it to build my plan.*" or "*Mike, have you considered this?*" This type of brainstorming and debate is fun for me! I really thrive when I meet with several, out-of-the-box, creative thinkers, and we are able to bat around ideas!
- 10- At the same time, the greatest ideas are useless unless we can execute them! Therefore, once we agree on a course of action, I like management plans that outline target dates and responsibilities assigned to each activity. I don't like procrastination (even though I resort to it sometimes when I am overwhelmed). Setting target dates and prompt follow-up are important.
- 11- I know that sometimes I float some untraditional ideas. But at the time, they make sense to me, and I need your help to fertilize my ideas with your thoughts. Sometimes, I don't see the entire picture and need your help in seeing more clearly since you may be closer to a certain activity. If I seem inflexible, give me a day to think about the issue, and I will usually come back and meet you half- way.
- 12- I am in the corporate office every day, constantly looking at the overall operation of the companies, and I see the big picture. But you have strengths that I do not, and you are on the frontlines more. None of us as individuals is great, but if you combine our strengths, we are unified and come much closer to achieving greatness!

- 13- A lot of what I do surrounds the five areas of efficiency, accountability, effectiveness, communications, and structure. If I bring up situations in these areas, remember reasonable order and flexible structures are important to me. I hate bureaucracy and am constantly looking for ways to speed up processes, project execution, and decision making. I strongly encourage, that to the extent possible, the left hand always knows what the right hand is doing.
- 14- I am very customer-driven, and my philosophy is that we need to give each customer "*what they want when they want it in an outstanding way.*" I want to see us consistently "*exceed every customer's expectations every time.*" I am really into customer feedback. We should never get into a situation where a customer rates us less than good or feels they are justified in asking for a refund. When we drop the ball with a customer, it upsets me if I hear staff talk as if the problem is the customer's fault. I believe that in nearly every case, the customer is always right and "*they sign our checks.*" Without them, we are nothing!
- 15- The book, *The One Minute Manager*, pretty much describes me. I am clear in my expectations of everyone in the organization; I look for things that people do right and try to let them know it; and I will also tell anyone who does not meet my expectations that I am concerned. There's an old expression: "*It's lonely at the top!*" There have been times that I greatly suffered because I had to be a strong president by firing people that I loved; laying off people I cared about; and making tough decisions to protect the company's best interests. In those situations, I had to be the company president and not the individual, Mike DuBose. I will fiercely protect the company, its staff, and customers. I see our company as a family.
- 16- I like for people to plan their meetings with me since I put a lot of preparation into meetings myself. I like pre-determined agendas and efficient meetings that start on time. It irritates me when folks come into meetings unprepared or late and throw off my planned schedule.
- 17- I like to help when needed. No one should ever see it as a weakness to ask me for help or for my worthless advice. I have a lot of energy, am passionate about building our companies to great ones, and love to lend a hand when I can. However, I will not do your job for you.
- 18- I dislike anyone sending me work to review as final that has not been proofed well and is less than quality.
- 19- I expect everyone in our organizations to do an outstanding job—good to me is not good enough. At the same time, I have learned that I have to be reasonable in my expectations toward perfection. Anyone who does less than outstanding work with our company really needs to think about finding another job.
- 20- I like to have fun and laugh. Even though I like to joke around, when the door closes on a meeting, it's all about business.
- 21- I love reading how other successful business leaders and companies achieved success and have read 50 best-selling business books in the last two years. These books and my notes in them are my treasures. They have taught me so much! I love writing articles and sharing my experience, mistakes, and failures, hoping that I can help others. I consider myself an average leader with a lot to learn. I tell myself that I am pretty dumb, and it is amazing how much I have learned over the last few years when I am looking up!
- 22- I try to hire people who are smarter, more organized, and more talented than I am.

- 23- I am very budget-minded and a financial hawk. I review every invoice before it is paid. I believe in strong cash flow, savings, and projecting budgets three years out. After having to cut expenses by eliminating some employees' positions, I vowed that I would not let that happen again if I could help it! Of course, we never know what the future holds for any of us or the company!
- 24- I view running a company as an experiment. Any experiment involves mistakes, failures, and stumbles. However, I see every problem as a fertile learning opportunity. Each mistake leads to better future decisions and wisdom. Consequently, I don't see any of my past mistakes as failures or regrets. I grew and learned from every one. And I want everyone in this company to avoid pointing the finger of blame, but rather admit their mistakes, bring them out into the open, dissect the problem, determine how we can do better next time, and take steps to prevent it from occurring again. I don't like to work with people who: ▪ Will not admit when they screwed up; ▪ Blame others for their mistakes; ▪ Think they know it all; ▪ Do not want to better themselves and learn; ▪ Are arrogant!
- 25- I don't apologize much, but when I do, you can be sure that it is sincere and that I am truly sorry and regret my actions. Usually, I apologize twice—once face-to-face with me looking you squarely in the eyes and in writing.
- 26- I don't thank people unless I mean it. But I may thank you for doing well in one part of your job one week and then express concerns the next week because you are not doing well in another area. Please keep in mind that I do this out of care and not control or being mean. My job is to help you to be great.
- 27- Two years ago, I was pretty money driven. But I have learned that while money greases the wheels, it will not buy happiness. Having too much money is unhealthy. We plan to give half the profits in CCC to charity. And, the PESOS program will share many of the RA's profits with you.
- 28- Fairness and consistency is important to me. I use the "golden rule" in working with folks.
- 29- I have learned to be mission-driven. Having a written company strategic plan for where we are going and how to get there is important. I like our companies to have a futuristic, shared, employee-driven vision. My philosophy is to learn from the past and focus on the present, while planning for the future. I do not like people dragging up the past and reminding me of how we screwed up. Once I visit the past, it is a done deal! Too many people are stuck in their past and live miserable, unhappy lives. I am a very happy person because I have accepted my painful past! I love my job and look forward to coming to work and seeing staff each day!
- 30- I really dislike negativity and do not tolerate gossip and defeatist talk.
- 31- I always follow my entrepreneur grandmother's advice: "*Hope for the best. Prepare for the worst.*" I also follow Jack Welch's advice in his book *Winning*: "*If you don't feel good about something, don't do it!*"
- 32- At times, you will notice that I am thinking about both the best and the worst simultaneously, trying to anticipate the unanticipated. So, if it appears that I'm worrying, I'm really just in a planning and prevention mode. Worry is useless – it solves nothing! Thus, I am really proactive and like to identify issues early on before they become problems.
- 33- I don't like surprises and stumbling onto something going on in the company that could be problematic or pose a threat to the company. I don't need details unless I ask for them. Many times I just want to know when there is a problem, you are handling it, and assurance that you will keep me posted.

- 34- I am trying to be a better listener. If I cut you off sometimes, don't mind saying, "*Now listen!*"
- 35- It is best not to have a dialog with me at night since my brain is fried, which can change my demeanor and thought processes! I may say or write something that is easily misinterpreted (i.e., something dumb!) or that I should not have said, and then an e-mail war can begin! If you want a quality response from me that ensures I'm pretty clear on your intent, the best time to communicate with me is between 7-10 AM.
- 36- I am a risk taker provided that the situation has been thoroughly analyzed and the odds are better than good it will work. You will frequently hear me say, "*Failure is not an option!*" But, at the same time, I expect to fail at times. Failure and Murphy are my closest teachers. I have failed more than I have succeeded!
- 37- I have had diabetes for 20+ years. If my blood sugar is too high or too low, it's not a good idea to try to meet with me since these changes can affect my personality (you might see a pair of horns emerging from my head)! Most of the time, I keep my condition under control and other than having a limited number of brain cells, I am pretty healthy! If I say something that bothers or concerns you, don't respond. Just wait a few days to get back to me—usually I will come back and talk about it.
- 38- Our failed national expansion taught me the danger in expanding too rapidly and having the wrong people in the wrong seats. You have to be careful how you define success—too much of it can kill a company. I am more interested in doing fewer things really well than doing a lot of things and failing at some of them.
- 39- Succession planning is critical to me, so I have a plan in case I die tomorrow. The company should not be dependent on any one person—it needs to supersede my family from controlling it if I die. We have non-family leaders in place to run it. It is important that I leave behind a company that can function without me. But if the good Lord is willing, I will never retire! Our companies are a part of me.
- 40- When the storms come and they will, expect me to be strong in front of you. I may fall apart when I get home!
- 41- I push for being a different company. I want us to swim upstream!
- 42- I love to travel once a quarter where I can visit Hawaii and sit on the ocean front, listening to the waves while I read my business books! This R&R re-charges me as a leader, and I come back all fired up. Restful, low-stress vacations are important for everyone.
- 43- I am really into marketing. The best products and services without a well-crafted marketing plan supported by factual data and trends will fail.
- 44- I am a dreamer, which scares my wife. I envisioned our Columbia Conference Center fifteen years ago. Now, I see myself driving a 1965 Corvette or having my own jet plane! Shoot, I may never own either one, but I like to dream about them! I like to believe in the impossible.
- 45- While I am a sinner and my behavior is not always what it should be, I am a very spiritual Christian, love the Lord, and enjoy glorifying Him in all things. My family and church are my top priorities.
- 46- I respect the religious and political views of others. But I believe political views in the company setting should be private since they can be controversial and divisive.

- 47- When I say something, I want to be credible and for you to be able to take what I say "*to the bank!*" If I ever fail in this or any other area, please let me know and give me a swift kick if needed with a smile on your face!!
- 48- I hope you never hear me say, "*I did that or that was my idea!*" I am trying to be humble, even though the human part of me sometimes screams for the credit! I am a *behind-the-scenes* leader who will give credit to others and the Lord. If you find yourself thinking: "*I am not sure what Mike does,*" that is a compliment and the way I like to manage.

Thanks for listening to me! I hope that maybe a little something here will help you understand me better. Don't forget that I am a little screwed up and will make mistakes. But, if you can help guide me and keep me out of trouble, our chances of success are much better!!

Sincerely,

Mike