

Rock Solid Don't Pick Up Hitchhikers

BLOG

This month, I am pleased to have my long-time friend, Dr. Mick Ukleja, founder and president of LeadershipTraQ, write a guest post. Mick is an international authority on leadership training and organizational effectiveness. He is a researcher, consultant, business leader, and speaker. He is also the co-author of the highly-acclaimed book Who Are You and What Do You Want?

Don't Pick Up Hitchhikers...Especially If They Are Monkeys

One evening, I went out to dinner with friends and enjoyed a great conversation. But the next morning, when I woke up, I realized that a couple of new responsibilities were now on my agenda. Somehow, I had agreed to call an acquaintance to ask a favor. Plus, I offered to help raise funds for an event. These obligations added even more to my already full "to-do" list.

Later at the office, one of my associates began to share a professional situation that had him baffled. Empathetic, I started formulating solutions to his problem. When time for brainstorming ideas ran out, I declared that I'd think more about his situation and get back to him. His problems became my burden.

What happened? My friends brought monkeys with them that dined at our table. When I left to go home, two of those monkeys rode in my car. At work, my associate came into my office with a monkey on his back. When he left, he didn't take it with him. That monkey had jumped on my shoulders!

How does it happen? According to Ken Blanchard, William Oncken, Jr., and Hal Burrows, in their great little book The One Minute Manager Meets The Monkey, people often volunteer to do things that are the responsibility of others. In my case, I accepted responsibility for the outcome of someone else's problem. Then I promised a progress report by saying, "I'll get back to you." At this point, I had committed myself. And, that was enough to make me want to avoid seeing that individual, because I knew he might ask how the solution was coming. Putting myself in the position of *doing another person's job* put the pressure on me.

What's the solution? One simple solution would have been *not* to say "yes" or commit myself until I thought things through. It's easier to *not* volunteer or to say "no" in the first place, than it is after the monkey is already holding on for dear life. Promising to monkey-sit is a win/lose situation.

This is true in our personal lives. And it's equally true in our professional lives as well. As we work with others, managing monkeys is essential. Blanchard, Oncken, and Burrows give

four rules in their book that can help:

Rule 1—Describe the monkey—Don't end the dialogue until the appropriate steps to deal with the monkey are identified and clarified.

Rule 2—Assign the monkey—All monkeys shall be handled at the lowest organizational level consistent with their welfare.

Rule 3—Insure the monkey—If it's your responsibility, then all monkeys leaving your back to ride on the back of a subordinate should have one of two insurance policies:

1. *Recommend, then act*—subordinates make recommendations and then you act.
2. *Act, then advise*—subordinates act and then report their action to you.

Rule 4—Check on the monkey—Check-ups lead to healthy monkey handling.

Applying these rules leads to healthier relationships as wayward monkeys are no longer the dreaded addition to busy schedules. (I actually look forward to seeing you.)

These tips will also increase the needed margin in your personal life. They help test reality, which in turn strengthens impulse control. Think twice before leaping.

If you don't manage the monkeys, they will manage you.