

## Leadership in Technology: Harnessing the Power of the Pyramid

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Leadership in health information technology seems to be hard to come by, which I find perplexing because it isn't that hard. You just have to harness the power of the pyramid.

Virtually everyone that's ever taken a college level psychology course has heard of or studied Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. They recognize the "pyramid" and how the physiological needs must first be met before you can make your way up the pyramid to "self actualization." I'm a big fan of the pyramid and using it to illustrate some fundamental principles.

The foundation level of the pyramid is comprised of what I call basic management functions, and what Peter Drucker calls, "Plan, Organize, Staff, Direct, and Control." Many of you probably faintly recognize this from a business class you took ages ago. It's still relevant in my mind. In order to be a good leader, or manager for that matter, you have to have these skills nailed. These skills are basic management competencies and I believe all truly great leaders do possess them.

The next layer of the Leadership

Pyramid is communication. There are three components in communication: the information, the sender, and the receiver. If any one of these isn't correct then communication doesn't take place. Seems pretty easy, doesn't it? Then why is it so hard? It's hard because it's important (I've found that most important things are hard, funny how that works). I did discover a useful tool along the way that I can share with you now.

Have you ever been around a group of US Soldiers and heard one of them give the rest of them some



**Wes Wright's "Leadership Pyramid"**

information and at the end of that information would say something like "who ah" in a questioning tone, and the group would respond back "who ah" in an affirmative tone? I always thought that was kind of strange but just chocked it up to the weirdness of Army dudes (I'm ex-Air Force). Turns out I was wrong, and the Army actually has a great system to make sure communication takes place by using this series of grunts. You see, what they're actually saying is HUA, which stands for "Heard, Understood, Acknowledged." I must admit that I've acquired this habit with some of my folks and when I have something really important I need to make sure is heard, understood, and then acknowledged, I'll give a "HUA" and expect one in return. It's kind of unusual, but the folks understand why I'm doing it and I think, deep down inside, think it's kind of cool. You cannot move to the next layer of the pyramid, motivate, without being able to communicate! HUA?

If YOU are not motivating your staff, then you are not LEADING

your staff. You may be thinking "what about all the folks I have that are self-motivated?" They're not self-motivated, they're self-interested. It's just a happy coincidence that the goals they have for themselves happen to align with the goals you have for your team. You need to align their self-interested goals with the goals of your team. In other words, they need to be motivated in the right direction. Once that happens, that person is "motivated," their self-interest just gives them more momentum to stay motivated. You still have to make sure the movement is in the right direction.

You manage, you communicate, and you motivate – you are now leading. Once you've reached the top of the leadership pyramid, your job is first, to stay there and second, to get better.

There's one major pitfall you need to avoid in order to keep from backsliding down the pyramid. It's giving too much homage to the tools and "tricks" that are at the base of the pyramid. This almost always results in developing

a communications problem; which in turn affects Team motivation. Make sure you keep your foundation solid, but not at the expense of the other layers of the pyramid. If you overemphasize any layer, let it be the communication layer.

Getting better at leadership takes a lot more work than just getting to the top of the pyramid. This should be obvious when you look around and see all the leaders (yes, they're truly "leading") but see so few great leaders. The great leaders have cultivated their leadership skills and now have top layers of the pyramid that are almost bigger than the base. As ungainly as that looks, it's what we should all be striving to do.

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