

The Blue Dryer

By Steve Anderson

I'm not what you call a detail person. In fact, my dad used to call me a "95 percenter". That is, I'd do 95% of the job and then go on to something else. I actually like this about myself, but I can't tell you how many times this quality has caused me heartburn. My wife, Char on the other hand, is quite detail oriented. As you can imagine, this has caused quite a few heated discussions between us or as I like to say "growth opportunities". But the other day, something happened that was really quite hilarious because of this difference between us. I want to share it with you because I think it illustrates several points about leadership that we all can learn from.

This month Char and I realized a long-time dream of buying a home on Hoover Reservoir. We are both excited about this purchase, but as you can imagine, the last month has been rather hectic. Anyway, we decided we needed a new dryer for the house and Char asked me to pick it up for her because I own a pickup truck. I'm sure she had a little trepidation in handing this task off to me since she knows I am not as detail oriented as she is. But she thought to herself, "Even someone with Steve's poor judgment can't screw this up." But she was wrong!

I went to Lowe's bought what I thought she wanted, brought it home and took it out of the box. She seemed happy, but the next day she confronted me. "I want to return the dryer, please don't get upset with me. I know I am a perfectionist, but I just don't like it." At first I wasn't upset, but I became upset when she told me why. It's blue, she said. I couldn't figure out what she was talking about. Maybe she meant the writing on the top of the dryer was blue. Maybe she has an incredible sense of color and could pick up blue tones in the white dryer. "For heaven's sake, this woman is impossible!" I thought to myself. But I never asked her what she meant about the dryer being blue.

A big discussion ensued, that was at times unpleasant. We went back and forth for fifteen minutes trying to resolve the situation and trying to make sure this did not happen again. In the end we decided that she would return the dryer and pick out one that she liked and I would stay away from making any large purchases for our home for at least the next one hundred years.

After coming to that agreement we walked into the garage so she could show me what she did not like about the dryer. She showed me the blue color she was talking about and I burst out laughing. "That's the protective film they put on it so that it doesn't get scratched!" I guffawed. She then burst into paroxysms of laughter as we both realized how ridiculous we looked. Then we peeled off the blue coating and Char was delighted with our new purchase. As I mused about this situation later I decided that it would make a good subject for an article for this month's newsletter. Here are some things I learned from this situation that might be helpful to you as well:

- 1) Communication is vital to the success of any endeavor. What happened to us was funny, but it's not funny when business opportunities are lost because team members are not on the same page. It's worth the extra time to communicate regularly about your plans so that you have alignment on your team.
- 2) Be assertive. Char was afraid to upset me when she saw the blue dryer, so she waited two days. If she had said something right away we could have resolved the situation immediately.
- 3) Be approachable. One of the reasons Char did not assert herself is that she was afraid I would become upset. I guess I have to work on my ability to respond to criticism non-defensively.
- 4) Delegate jobs to the proper team member. I don't think I'll be doing any appliance shopping any time in the future.
- 5) Have a sense of humor. Char and I had a great laugh over this situation. If you can't laugh at yourself life can get unbearable.