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# Developing leaders from within

## Business owner focuses on fairness, positivity

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Herald Times Reporter

MANITOWOC — Hiring a leader from outside one's company is very challenging and often doesn't lead to a good "cultural fit."

Companies that develop leaders are typically more successful and effective than those that hire leaders from a different company.

Those perspectives were shared Tuesday by Kenlyn Gretz, president and CEO of Americollect, at Tuesday's Sail Lunch & Learn presentation titled, "Developing Your Company's Leadership Principles."

Considering the rapid growth of the Manitowoc collection agency he purchased in 1999, Gretz, along with his employees, must be doing a lot right.

In 2009 and 2010 "Inc Magazine" included Americollect in its list of "5000 Top Growing Privately Held Companies in America."

Among his take-home messages, many of which are part of Americollect's Teammate Rules:

- » Failures need to be shared as a learning opportunity and be thankful when client companies give negative feedback.
- » Recognize the strengths and challenges for those who are more suited as technical leaders versus natural leaders versus groomed leaders.
- » Most leaders in small businesses are expected to provide leadership in both work management (planning, organizing, time and money management, budgeting) as well as in influencing of people through vision, motivation, persuasion and mentoring.

Gretz said leadership principles have to be "home-grown," specific to one's own company or business.

For Americollect, they have been developed and refined after months of meetings with "slow discussion."

"Speak the truth tactfully, even if the truth could be hurtful," Gretz said. "Don't confuse your opinion as always being the truth. Encourage others to be honest."

» Fairness in employee relations may be perceived dramatically different so "apply the rules evenly and consistently and especially to yourself," Gretz said. "If an exception is made, explain why and re-evaluate the rule."

» Gretz urged his audience to create ownership among staff members and engage in leadership development by giving responsibility to others, followed by accountability.

» "Be ready to change, listen to other options and foster change ... assume change is for the best," Gretz said.

» A vital asset for company leadership, and prospective new leaders, is the ability to listen before reacting.

"Listen until they finish. Breathe, investigate the facts," Gretz said. "Ask questions. Restate the issues for clarity.

"Communicate the time frame for solutions. Take the time to think before you answer and really hear what is being said."

» A corporate culture that becomes attractive to current and prospective employees focuses on a positive outlook, Gretz believes.

"Believe in each other and encourage others," he said. "Show your positive side, even when it is hard. Take pride in your and others' work and acknowledge greatness."