

# The Human Element

Use the phrase *the human element strategy* to mean the following: At every turn and in every decision we make, we are dealing with people—be they our clients, customers, family, or employees. Applying the human element strategy to every decision we make involves never losing focus of how that decision will influence those around us. So, we need to make all our decisions keeping in mind the needs, desires, and goals of those people we’re engaging, while, at the same time, we try to image what’s on their minds. The applicable pearl is below, with my addition in parenthesis:

“If you help enough people (with a dream) get what they want, you get what you want.”

– ZIG ZIGLAR

When we apply the human element strategy successfully, we can set ourselves apart—professionally and personally—because people are naturally drawn to people who care about them. I have seen this time and time again and I know it works.

The essence of this strategy is to listen closely during each interaction we have, and “climb inside the head” of whomever we’re speaking with, looking directly into their eyes (when we can), to truly develop an

understanding of where they're coming from and what they need. When we do this, we can successfully meet that need—be it a product, a contract opportunity, or a potential employment engagement—and the person knows that they were heard and that we are sincerely focused on helping them. This, in essence, is applying the human element strategy.

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## Applying the Human Element Strategy

This principle is not new. The whole idea goes back for millennia; in fact, it's biblical. Giving, sharing, and caring for other human beings are basic practices necessary to achieve a fulfilled life. So why not internalize the idea and apply it every day in your business?

In researching the human element concept, I discovered other industry leaders commenting on the subject. In an article in *Entrepreneur* magazine, Zach Ferres, CEO of Coplex, wrote that, "Every part of your business boils down to people. And by understanding the human element, you'll be more profitable, lead more effectively, create brand loyalty, close more deals and do better work."

The human element strategy is critical, even in today's fast-paced and high-tech world. If more business owners and leaders practiced it, I believe they would be more successful and have greater trust and engagement with their businesses and among their employees. I know this is true because I lived it in the nineties and continue to practice it today—it is indeed a timeless and proven-effective principle.

Many of us in the government contracting world can get so focused on the business at hand that we forget the value of positively interacting with the people around us on a basic human level. If we can keep the human element at the forefront of our minds, it will guide us as we make each of the tactical and strategic decisions we face. When we lose sight of the human element, we can become derailed from our ultimate corporate objectives.

## **Applying the Human Element Strategy Starts with You**

Successfully applying the human element in life and in our businesses starts with those of us in leadership or ownership positions. This is the only way to ensure that it becomes widely practiced at every level of our business. So that requires slowing down for a moment and finding a quiet place and calmly looking inside yourself and asking:

- Who am I?
- What am I doing here?
- What am I trying to accomplish in my life?"

In answering these questions, you will likely begin to envision and visualize how many people are in your life and you'll begin to think about how they were drawn to you. The answer is that the people who are close to us and who are part of our lives likely got there because we helped them, cared for them, shared with them, and loved them. What happened in these cases is that we were applying the human element, maybe without realizing it. But our caring and focusing on them drew them to us because we had been overlaying the human element over time in our engagements with them.

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## **Leadership Team**

It is my very strong belief that understanding the positive impact of applying the human element in our business dealings and our personal lives is the only way we can successfully share and teach others to apply this concept in their lives, particularly in the case of sharing it with our business leadership teams and ultimately our entire business workforce. Below are

a few ways you can simply and easily apply the human element strategy in your day-to-day activities with your leadership team.

- Instead of kicking off your Monday morning staff meeting by launching immediately into business and problem issues, consider opening with, “Hey, everybody, I hope you had an enjoyable weekend and I’m glad you are here safely. Also, before we get started, who had a positive weekend event they’d like to share with us?”

*Having been around a while, I’ve witnessed “old school management thinking” which might reject this suggestion, but the current workforce appreciates this kind of positive culture, which I believe creates trust and loyalty and continues to enhance a culture of caring and sincerity.*

- During a leadership team member’s annual performance review session, start with something like, “Hey, I know this is a planned annual performance review, but let’s start by looking over your self-evaluation document and discussing how you feel about your job. Rest assured, we want to really know how you feel about it and if it’s not satisfying your personal career objectives, let’s see what other positions we have that you could get excited about.”

*This is an example of how applying the human element creates a positive and collaborative workplace environment. Taking a moment to apply the human element strategy to an annual review event reminds the employee in front of you that they are more than just performing a role in your company. It results in their feeling valued and cared about and will make them want to stay with your company.*

These examples go on and on. And you’ll notice that these are simple and easy things to do, but they can make a huge difference. The point is that it’s easy to get caught up in what’s on our minds and forget that at every

turn we have an opportunity to engage our leadership team members by genuinely caring about them and continually leaving them with a lasting positive impression. If you consistently practice overlaying every encounter with the human element strategy, you will have a leadership team who likes you, feels empowered by you, and who will continually support your objectives.

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## **Customers, Associates, and Digital Examples**

The opportunities to apply the human element truly exist at every turn, with everyone you interact with, and even exist when you can't be face-to-face. Below are some more examples of ways you can apply the human element strategy with your customers, associates, and digitally.

- You have just walked into your customer's office for a contract status discussion. Before launching into the contract dialog, you open with something that references an earlier discussion you had. You open the dialog with something like: "The last time we were together you mentioned that you and your wife were going on vacation. How was it?"
- You're meeting with a contract team and an associate partnering contractor to discuss pursuing an opportunity together. In this group setting you again have an opportunity to exercise the human element strategy. Before the group goes into a discussion about the current opportunity you open by asking the attendees to share their previous successful experiences with opportunity pursuits relative to proposal approaches and theme building. You get them talking and you listen.
- Imagine you are about to have a recurring federal government DoD customer monthly status meeting on a project. Everyone is sitting

around a conference table and the meeting is about to begin. You say, “Well, here we are again together to discuss how our project is doing and its status. But today I’d like to open the meeting by stating how appreciative we are to have you as a customer. This work is so important, and we appreciate your funding that is so effectively supporting our men and women on active duty.” I know you have to pick your moments to do this with customers who may have an attitude and react with a shrug and just want to get on with it, but there will be positive customers whose projects are going well and a comment like that would be appropriate.

- Here is an example of strengthening a contract partnering relationship with a prime or sub-contractor. You are having lunch with these partnering individuals and everyone has just been seated. You open with, “I want to thank you for taking the time today to have lunch with us. You must know how important our relationship is as we continue to work together on these projects and how excited we are to continue this relationship as we pursue future opportunities together.” What I’m telling you here is obvious and you may understand it and are even doing it, but I’m emphasizing it because you have to develop an ongoing approach to think about it continually and always prepare to apply it in every engagement; you are becoming a human element practitioner.
- Another opportunity for overlaying the human element is in your email and social media exchanges. When we receive a business-related email, we sometimes are in such a hurry that we just reply with a pointed response. By doing this, though, we miss an opportunity to overlay the response with something like, “Thanks for sending me this message,” or “I’m glad to hear from you on this situation.” Adding something personal gives us the opportunity to remind the other person that they are important to us. The other

important habit to get into is to respond using the name of the person who sent you the message.

Opportunities for practicing the human element strategy will present themselves constantly. You will have to decide if you are going to practice it or not. My genuine hope is that you do because doing so is what will set you apart from your competitors and will keep your workforce and everyone around you positive, motivated, and appreciative.