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BY MARIE PEELER
Peeler Associates

Bringing Grocery Store Leadership To The Table

There is no denying it, grocery store managers are leaders on the front line. Grocery stores are high-touch businesses, where customers and employees alike expect to have immediate access to a manager when they have an issue or challenge. Such issues are usually resolved in real-time, i.e. on the spot. Unlike a business that is separated from its customers by a phone line or the Internet, there is no opportunity to put the customer "on hold" or delay a response in

order to take time to collect one's self.

Customer issues are resolved in an environment that not only contains a spotlight but that hosts a myriad of other challenges, including long hours, a fast pace, and the constant juggle of staffing, inventory, and profitability. Despite these challenges, the credibility of every leader—from the part-time supervisor to the store manager—as well as the success of the grocery store depend on how the leaders behave under scrutiny and pressure.

Thus, it is time to bring leadership and the development of creative leadership competencies to the table for gro-

cery store leaders.

These skills, or creative competencies, encompass traits that allow a leader to be more effective. They include conveying authenticity and relating well to others—and having others sense this and believe in the leader. Leaders with strong creative competencies are also forward-thinking and tend to envision the big picture well, understanding how all the pieces fit together, and recognizing that sometimes the results of their actions might not be seen for months later.

To draw out these creative competencies, and to keep reactive tendencies (such as being overly compliant or excessively driven) at

bay, especially during times of stress when one becomes most vulnerable to falling back on reactive tendencies, it's important to achieve a level of self-awareness that allows for recognition of these tendencies, and the ability to hold them in check.

Leaders can achieve higher self-awareness by making an effort to reflect on their actions and results; keeping a data book or journal can be instrumental in the process. Obtaining feedback either through a 360 survey or by simply asking for it is an excellent method of understanding how we are actually perceived by others. Finally, working with a professional

coach can support a leader in developing self-awareness and other creative competencies.

Even though it can be a challenge, by taking time out for their own leadership development, leaders will be fostering a creative pause that directs them to focus internally rather than externally, on being rather than doing. That's the type of leadership that needs to be encouraged and brought to the table.

(Marie Peeler is a principal of Peeler Associates, a Pembroke, Mass.-based organization that helps leaders clarify objectives, find engagement, improve interpersonal effectiveness, and attain their goals through services. For more information, please visit www.peeler-associates.com.)