

## Retail Leadership: Leading With Edge

One of my favorite books on leadership is *The Leadership Engine* by Noel Tichy. Noel Tichy is a professor at the University of Michigan Business School and worked closely with Jack Welch for years. In the book Tichy talks about leaders having Edge, which he defines as the "unflinching readiness to face reality and the courage to act." Facing reality in business is not always easy. Leading organizations is fun when things are going well but all businesses are cyclical and there will always come a time when a leader must face hard realities. Those realities might concern product, property, time, money, resources or, toughest of all, people. Successful leaders have the ability to separate themselves from their emotions and see situations for what they are, not what they want them to be.

I have found that decisions about people are by far the most difficult. Behind every downsizing, every role change or termination is a person and a family. And that's why Edge is most important when it comes to giving people feedback. The worst thing we as leaders and managers can do is not give people honest and straightforward feedback. How will people ever improve if we don't tell them where they're excelling and what they need to work on? Edge is about confronting employees who fail to do what is expected of them, even when we like them. Edge is about doing what's right for the company and the team, regardless of our own personal feelings.

When I was about twenty years old I was going to school full time as well as working full time at a stereo store as an assistant manager. I thought I was doing a pretty good job in spite of my extremely full schedule. One day I was called into the office by the store manager. I was sure I was going to be given a raise. Instead I was fired. The manager said he had been trying to coach me for months but I had failed to improve. My job was in jeopardy and I didn't even know it. I failed in my job but my manager failed in his. He didn't have the Edge necessary to tell me directly what I was doing wrong.

From that day on I promised myself that if I ever had to fire someone, it would never be a surprise. I told myself that I would give people the feedback they deserved. I haven't always been successful but I try. What I have realized over the years is that if I have faith in a person's ability I can give them any kind of feedback. It's when I see people failing in a job they shouldn't have that I struggle to give feedback. In the end, though, I can do it because of my own experience. My ultimate aim here is to be able to look at a person I've had to terminate and know that I've given that person every possible chance. They might have failed in the job but I did not fail them.

So let me ask, do you have Edge? Do you see things as they are or as you want them to be? Are you addressing the things in your organization that you deep down know you need to address? Are you giving people who work for you the feedback they need to hear? Are you doing what you know you need to do?

Tichy ends his chapter on Edge with this: "The final test of edge is whether the leader can in total honesty say, "I acted when I should have. I've had the courage of my convictions." I hope you follow yours.

**About the author:** Doug Fleener is a veteran retailer with over 30 years of hands-on retail experience with world-class retailers including Bose Corporation and The Sharper Image. He has also owned and operated his own specialty stores. As the Director of Retail for Bose Corporation, Doug was instrumental in developing the unique and engaging retail methods that have become the industry's benchmarks for experience based retailing and superb customer service.

Doug is now president and managing partner of Dynamic Experiences Group LLC, a Lexington based retail consulting firm dedicated to helping retailers create unique customer experiences that results in higher sales and profits. Learn more at [www.dynamicexperiencesgroup.com](http://www.dynamicexperiencesgroup.com) or call Doug at 866-535-6331.

Fleener also shares his knowledge of experience based retailing in a series of custom key notes and workshops designed for stores, businesses, corporations, non-profits, and trade associations of all sizes. His casual style and quick wit make him not just a crowd pleaser but also an incredible motivator, encouraging people to take action and deliver extraordinary experiences to customers and employees alike. Learn more at [www.dougfleener.com](http://www.dougfleener.com).