

You Can't Lead by Following!



If you want to be in first place, you'd better figure out where to go and how to get there.

When my kids were young, sailboat races were held every Memorial Day on the lake where we have our summer cottage. One of the races was for kids and, when my oldest son was eleven, he decided that he wanted to have a go at it.

The first problem was that, while he could sail pretty well, he had zero knowledge of or experience in racing so he had to ask for my help. Our next problem was that he announced his intentions only an hour or so before the race was to begin. Our most significant problem, however, was that sailboat racing is all about strategy and, while I've been sailing all my life and had read a lot about racing, I, too, had zero personal experience; I've never raced. Of course, to a kid Dad knows everything so I was on the hook to do what I could to get him prepared to at least avoid embarrassment.

After explaining the basics of how to cross the starting line (Yes, sailors, I know that's a major issue in itself but what could I do?) I gave him the only advice I could, "Watch for someone who establishes a lead. Then follow as closely as you can in his path, tacking (turning) where he does." Well, it worked! Don was soon in second place and he maintained it for quite a while. Then disaster struck; he sailed past the guy in the lead! Suddenly, there was no one to follow; my son found himself in the lead with no knowledge of where to go or what to do next!

Well, the crisis was short-lived. The former leader took advantage of the situation and retook the lead. Don wisely fell in behind him and finished in a very respectable second place.

Second place is an excellent showing for an eleven year old boy in his first sailboat race and we were justly proud. Is second place where you want to be as a company? Remember the spoils go to the victors, not to the also-rans. The power of being first is directly linked to sales, profits, and shareholder value.

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About J. H. Welsch Consulting, L.L.C.

Jack Welsch has had over 4 decades of experience in engineering and new product development at all levels and has been awarded over 35 U.S. patents. He has been directly involved with the phased and gated development process since 1979 and has spent much of his time and energy in the continuous improvement of the process. While most of his career has been spent in manufacturing companies, he has taught the business aspects of product development as an adjunct instructor, at both Lehigh and Wilkes Universities. In addition to his roles as Principal of J. H. Welsch Consulting, L.L.C., he is Chairman of Wilkes' Industrial Advisory Board.

J. H. Welsch Consulting, L.L.C. is dedicated to helping firms improve their new product development process. Learn more at www.jhwelsch.com/npd.