

A KEEWAYDIN "HALFWAY" SERVANT LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

- ▲ Employee engagement is crucial to outperforming competitors
- ▲ Simple Steps in Servant Leadership is a key factor in obtaining engagement
- ▲ Workers are acutely aware of leadership's actions on their behalf



The summer of my 7th grade, my parents thought it would be great if I spent a summer at a canoe camp in Ontario. They packed me up and sent me on an overnight train from my home in Colorado to Chicago, followed by another overnight train to Toronto and a day train up north to Lake Temagami. A one-hour ferry ride handled the last leg to Devil's Island and Keewaydin Camp.

A Bracing Dip

The following day, we were all administered a swim test, which set the tone for my two-month stay in the Canadian woods. It consisted of jumping off the dock into the water and proving we could swim a reasonable distance. I proudly jumped in to display my ability. As this was the last day of June, and Lake Temagami is 450 km (280 mi) due north of Toronto, the water was so cold that I almost jumped back up onto the dock out of sheer reflex! **I could hardly draw a breath – some fun!**

Canoeing was no joyride either. Paddling around in a lake was ok, but going from one lake to another required gathering all the gear from the canoe and "portaging" across the ground to the next body of water. We traveled in a group; in each canoe, we carried our foodstuffs and canvas tent, contained in and on a lidded box called a "wanigan", and our bedroll and clothes were stuffed into duffel bags, two to a canoe.

The bedrolls were lashed together with a long leather strap called a “tumpline”, made of a long length of leather with a wide, reinforced strip in the center. The wanigans and canoes were similarly outfitted with these tumplines. The boys would lift them onto their backs, and the strap would fit across the head so that the neck, back and shoulders bore the weight evenly. The three items, wanigan, bedrolls and canoe, were then carried one at a time across the portage to the new lake. The canoe was carried the entire distance by the sternman, and he would go back to the halfway point where the bowman had carried either the wanigan or the bedroll halfway, then go back to get the other item and carry it across. **All sorts of fun!**



The “Keewaydin Halfway”

Despite my lack of enthusiasm for the attractions of intermittent rain, wet clothes, and mosquitoes attacking at the most inconvenient times, canoe camping imparted some valuable life lessons. One of them was the importance of a “Keewaydin Halfway”. The bowman would carry the first load as much as 2/3 of the way to the other side because the sternman had the canoe, a much heavier load. He would then return and get the bedrolls and make the portage to the other side. The sternman would then collect the wanigan at the halfway point and make his way to the spot to “put in”, and the canoe parade would begin again – **two months of portages and “Keewaydin Halfways”.**

All these years later, that value, impressed on me as a boy, has stayed with me in my work with executives. As servant leaders, what are we doing for those who are doing the “heavy lifting”? According to Gallup’s 2017 report, *State of the American Workplace*, [Only] Three in 10 U.S. employees strongly agree[d] that, [with]in seven days, someone noticed and complimented them on their work. By moving that ratio to six in 10 employees, organizations could realize a 24% improvement in quality, a 27% reduction in absenteeism and a 10% reduction in shrinkage.” These employees reported that they placed importance on the specificity and immediacy of providing recognition and that the most meaningful recognition came from their manager, followed by recognition from a leader or CEO, their manager’s manager, customers, and peers.

Go the Distance

Are we making the work we do as leaders a “Keewaydin Halfway” on behalf of our people? Are we going that extra mile to ensure that they have clarity of mission and vision? Do they know why we are asking for their efforts? Do they have the right tools and environment to thrive? Do we help them understand why their job matters and is important? **These simple, straightforward investments in our people and our internal value proposition yield enormous dividends on our external value proposition – and it isn’t even necessary to wear insect repellent!**