

The Heart of a Leader

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Leadership isn't just about having a powerful position; anytime you use your influence to affect the thoughts and actions of others, you are engaging in leadership. The best leaders are those who understand that their power flows through them, not from them.

Catching people doing things right is a powerful management concept; unfortunately, most leaders have a genius for catching people doing things wrong. I always recommend that leaders spend at least an hour a week wandering around their facility catching people doing things right. But I remind them that effective praising must be specific. Just walking around saying, "Thanks for everything", is meaningless. If you say, "Great job!" to a poor performer and, "Great job!" to a good performer, you sound ridiculous to the poor performer and you demotivate the good performer. Catching people doing things right provides satisfaction and motivates good performance, but remember, give praise immediately, make it specific, and encourage people to keep up the good work.

Many well-intentioned leaders wait to praise their people until they do things exactly right, complete the project, or accomplish the goal. The problem here is that they could wait forever. You see, *exactly right* behavior is made up of a whole series of *approximately* right behaviors. It makes more sense to praise progress---it's a moving target.

People are motivated to do things that provide them with feedback on results. Feedback is important to people. We all want to know how well we are doing, that's why it is essential for an effective performance review system to provide ongoing feedback. I firmly believe that providing feedback is the most cost-effective strategy for improving performance and instilling satisfaction. It can be done quickly, it costs nothing, and it can turn people around fast.

The minute you decide to be part of a team, you're going to lose some things and gain others. What you're going to gain is synergy---one plus one

equals more than two. What you're going to lose is having your ideas automatically accepted. If you're going to be part of a winning team, you have to be willing to accept some losses. Certainly fight for your ideas, try to convince others; but if they can't or won't buy into your thinking, it's time to take a deep breath and let go. Learning to let go, to put the team's will first, is an empowering experience that leads to the most wonderful of all experiences: being a member of a high-performance team.

The very best leaders are learners---people who are always interested in ways to enhance their own knowledge and skills. Great leaders find their own approach to learning. Some read, some listen to CD's, some spend time with mentors. They do whatever it takes to keep learning. Some people might think that once you know how to do your job, you can devote your time and attention to more important matters than ongoing learning. But as a leader, you must model the behavior you want others to emulate. If you're not serious about learning, you can bet the majority of those watching you won't be either. By continuing to learn, you can keep up with the completion, respond to new challenges, and maximize your talents.

If you are not sure how much direction people need when working on a task, it's always better to over supervise than under supervise in the beginning. Why? Because if you find that your people are better performers than you thought, and you loosen up, they will respond in a positive way. It also helps as you seek to communicate your growing respect for the quality of work they are producing. On the other hand, if you start off under supervising your people and later discover their skills are not as good as you had anticipated, you then have a sticky situation. Even when it is appropriate to correct or redirect their work, you may find that they perceive your efforts as undue criticism, micromanaging, or even persecution. After all, they aren't doing anything differently, so why are you suddenly bent on changing things? Resentment grows. Remember: it's always easier to loosen up than to tighten up.

If you want to know why your people are not performing well, step up to the mirror and take a peek. From (Ken Blanchard's) my point of view, one of the worst concepts in the history of leadership theory is the "Peter Principle." According to the Peter Principle, people in organizations tend to rise to their level of incompetence. In other words, they keep getting promoted until they become a failure. I believe this concept lets managers off the hook. Good leaders are committed to helping their people win. When someone fails, they accept responsibility for that failure. I think any time you fire someone who works for you, or anytime you're looking for a place to hide someone who works for you; Lawrence Peter called this, "a lateral arabesque", you should step up to the mirror and take a peak. In most cases, the biggest cause of the problem will be looking you in the eyes. The main job of a leader is to help his or her people succeed in accomplishing their goals. And when people accomplish their goals and win, everyone wins.

If you want your people to be responsible, be responsive to their needs. The traditional hierarchy is okay for goal setting. People look to the head of their department and to the top of their organization for direction. But once goals are clear, the pyramid should, in essence, be turned upside down. This way the client is at the top of the hierarchy, followed by the client-contact people, while the president and the chairman of the board are at the bottom. When this philosophy is implemented, your role as a leader changes from being *responsible* to being *responsive*. Your job as a leader becomes to work with your employees, rather than having them work for you. Being responsible (able to respond) for getting the job done. Make your people responsible for doing high-quality work by responding to their needs and supporting them. That places the responsibility at the appropriate level---with the people who do the work.

People with humility don't think less of themselves, they just think of themselves less. One of the greatest addictions in the world today is the human ego. Leaders who fall victim to this addiction want to be center stage. Often they are threatened by the successes of others, so they fail to

develop and use people's talents or catch them doing something right. These leaders want to be the best---"the fairest of them all." Here's a great rule for doing business today: Think more about your people, and they will think more of themselves. Leaders need to come out from behind their curtains of infallibility, power, and control, and let their "very good" side---their humanity---be revealed. Folks like to be around people who are willing to admit their vulnerability, ask for ideas, and can let others be in the spotlight.

Good thoughts in your head that are not communicated mean "squat." There are three responses people can receive from leadership concerning their performance: positive, negative, or no response at all. Only one response of the three tends to increase good performance: the positive one. And yet, the major leadership style used today is to say nothing at all. A person who does something correctly and receives a positive response will most likely continue that desired behavior in the future. By the same token a person who receives a negative response for doing something wrong will most likely not repeat the behavior. But what if that same person does something correctly and receives no response at all? The behavior may continue for a while, but eventually it will decline. Why; because no one seems to care. Many leaders notice their people doing things right and think well of them; unfortunately, they do not always put those positive thoughts into words. As a result, this good performance gets no response. If you want to get and maintain good performance, you must let your people know you notice and care about the things they do right. Share your good thoughts.

Without a change in your behavior, just saying, "I'm sorry" is not enough. It's human to make mistakes. When leaders mess up, (after all leaders are only human), the one minute apology is one of the most powerful things they can do. If leaders don't learn to apologize and repair the problems they've created by their mistakes, they lose the confidence of their bosses and coworkers. Saying, I'm sorry is just the first step in an effective apology. The only way you can demonstrate that you are really sorry is by

changing your behavior. When you do this, the people you have harmed know that you are committed to not repeating the mistake. The longer you wait to apologize, the sooner your weakness will be perceived as wickedness. The power of the One Minute Apology is deeper than just saying a few words: It's an investment in relationships that reaps countless rewards.

A tendency toward grimness and seriousness can stifle an organization's environment and limit its creativity. You can tell right away when you visit a facility where no one is having any fun---people look like they are running around with tight underwear on! They are longing to lighten up, but they have no permission. Today's leaders must relearn the value of a smile or they will be unable to fire up the ability of their people to find real enjoyment in their work. So start thinking smiles until you become a smile millionaire; employees will be glad to see you coming.

Real communication happens when people feel safe. Real communication is a product of trust. However, most of the performance review and evaluation systems used in organizations today create mistrust. They are based on a normal distribution mentality that insists that there must always be winners and losers. That has never made sense to me. No organization makes a habit of hiring losers! You either hire winners; people you think can become good performers. So why would you ever sort your people out into a normal distribution? Your job is to bring out their magnificence. Find ways to convince your employees that you see them all as either winners or potential winners and that you mean them no harm. When you do, you will find that communication within your facility is greatly enhanced.

Vision is a lot more than putting a plaque on the wall. A real vision is lived, not framed. Leaders today must have a strong vision and positive beliefs that support that vision. If they don't, their employees will not only lose, but they'll be lost. When difficulties arise, their minds will not be prepared to stand up to the challenge. A clear vision is really just a picture of how things would be if everything were running as planned. The most powerful

dream a leader can have is a vision of perfection. Dreams lift us up. If we really believe them, we start acting as if they are already true. That kind of enthusiasm is contagious. All great companies and teams have a visionary leader at the helm, someone who is always pointing toward the kind of organization they're going to be. People have a need to follow this type of leader, an inspiring individual who keeps them on track when difficulties arise.

Situational Leadership II is a model that identifies four development levels people go through as they move from dependence independence in completing a task. These include the Enthusiastic Beginner (excited but has little knowledge), the Disillusioned Learner (learning the task was tougher than he or she thought), the Capable but Cautious Performer (knows how to do it but is nervous about doing it on his or her own), and the Self-Reliant Achiever (confident, motivated, and has the necessary skills). The point is that no individual is at any one stage in all the tasks he or she performs. Consequently, the same person may need different leadership styles (different strokes) for various tasks. For example, when I was a college professor, I loved to teach and write. Those were tasks I performed well and without supervision. However, when it came to administrative matters like managing my budget and filling out reports, I was a Disillusioned Learner at best. Sometimes it takes different strokes for the same folks.

“If God had wanted us to talk more than listen, He would have given us two mouths rather two ears”, Ken Blanchard

When you ask people about the best leader they ever had, one quality is always mentioned: they are good listeners. These leaders have learned to “sort by others”. When someone says, “it’s a beautiful day,” they respond by keeping focus on the speaker. For example, they’ll respond, “it sounds like you’re pretty happy today.” Poor listeners “sort by self”. If you express a concern you have, they will express a concern they have. Our senior consulting partner, Laurie Hawkins, is a great listener. Clients tell me, “I

had the greatest dinner with Laurie recently; he's a wonderful person." When I ask what they know about Laurie---whether he's married or has kids---they seldom know. They loved being with Laurie because he kept the conversation focused on them. Test the power of listening by taking time to truly listen and focus on others.

Let people bring their "brains" to work, and let them use their knowledge. Research has shown that when people are empowered to make decisions and take initiative, the organizations benefit overall. Leaders of the best-run companies know that empowering people creates positive results that are not possible when all of the authority has moved up the hierarchy and managers shoulder all the responsibility for success. For many leaders, it's hard to change to a mindset that shifts responsibility to their employees. We feel it is our responsibility to tell people what to do, how to do it, and why it needs to be done. Leaders must make a leap of faith and fight the battle against the command and control tradition. Empowerment requires a major shift in attitude. The most crucial place where this shift must occur is in the heart of every leader.

There's only power in empowerment if you are a self-leader. Self-leaders become partners with their leaders. They develop the ability to pick up the ball and run with it. They learn how to challenge their assumed constraints---beliefs that limit them---and reach for what they need to succeed. Self-leaders learn to use all their points of power---knowledge power, task power, personal power, and relationship power---rather than relying only on their position power. Finally, self-leaders learn how to collaborate with others to get the support and direction they need to achieve their goals.

Leadership is not just what happens when you're there; it's what happens when you're not there. Leading effectively means more than just getting results; it means getting the commitment of the team. Many leaders focus only on results and forget about their employees. They bang people over their heads until the job gets done. Their definition of success is the team's

short-term output. The true test of leadership, on the other hand is to win the trust and respect of the team, keep motivation running high, and help it reach new heights. When you win your team's trust, it will work together and consistently perform well over time---even when you're not around. Leading people is the opposite of trying to control them; it's about gaining their trust through your integrity, developing their potential through your partnership, and motivating them through your affirmation.

What's the best response when one of your employees makes a mistake? First of all, check out the facts. If the person admits to making the mistake and corrects it, you're off the hook. If not, I recommend the "one minute reprimand." Tell the person involved exactly what he or she did wrong and explain how it impacted the team or facility. Next share with the person how you feel about it---"I'm frustrated and disappointed with what happened." Pause for a moment to let your remarks sink in, and then reaffirm your confidence in the individual. People sometimes ask, "why reaffirm someone you're upset with?" Reaffirming is important because you want the person to walk away thinking about correcting the wrong behavior, rather than how he or she has been mistreated or misunderstood. You want to get rid of the behavior not the person.

When you know what you stand for, you can turn around on a dime and have five cents change. Ask yourself how long it would take your employees to process a major product change, get behind it, and still meet deadlines. The key to having outstanding, enthusiastic, flexible, and on-time team is to make sure your people are values-driven, rather than goals-driven. If the number one shared value is to serve, then they will be ready to do whatever it takes to live that value. The minute you proclaim a goal, it's real and it's set. Values don't work that way. Values become real only when you demonstrate them in the way you act and the way you insist others behave. Goals are for the future; values are for now. Goals are set; values are lived. Goals change; values are rocks you can count on.

Servant leadership is more about character than style. Robert Greenleaf defines two kinds of leaders. Strong natural leaders are those who try to take control, make the decisions, and give the orders in any situation in which they find themselves; they have a need to be in charge. Strong natural servants, on the other hand, will assume leadership only if they see it as a way in which they can serve. You would think that natural leaders would use a directive, autocratic style, while natural servants would use a more supportive, participative style. This assumption falls short because it confuses style with character. I want to be led by strong natural servants because they are willing to use whatever leadership style---directive, supportive, or some combination---that best serves the needs of those they are leading. Servant leaders, however, look at leadership as an act of service. They embrace and welcome feedback, viewing it as a source of useful information on how they can provide better service.

Take the time to identify core values. Identifying the core values that define your facility is one of the most important functions of leadership. The success or failure of this process can literally make or break an organization. For example; let's look at The Walt Disney Company. This organization has identified four values for its theme parks: safety, courtesy, the show, and efficiency. Not only has it identified its values, but it has also carefully ordered them. Why is this important? A bottom-line-oriented manager might emphasize efficiency and thus jeopardize the other three values. You would be wise to make the identification of your organization's core values a top priority. And don't try to do this job alone. Take advantage of the resources you have around you and bring everyone into the process early. Draw in your people---everyone should have ownership in this process. Remember that rules can be imposed, but values cannot.

Without some method of locating gaps between values and behavior, identifying and communicating core values will do more harm than good. This means that it is vital for organizations and their leaderships to "walk their talk". They must make every effort to become living symbols of their organization's value system; this is simply common sense. Eighty percent

of the time allocated for implementing the “managing by values” process is given to this step. Why; because without it, the other steps would be useless. The good news is that once core values have been set in place---identified, communicated, and impacting behavior---they become the “boss”. And keep in mind this is an ongoing process, a journey without a finish line.

All genuine leadership is built on trust---and there are many ways to build trust. One way is to live consistently with the values you profess. For example; if your clients are important, your actions had better support that statement. If you choose to live as if clients aren’t important, people will have reason to question your trustworthiness. And in the final analysis, if you are deemed untrustworthy by your employees, you will not be trusted---or followed---as a leader.

To be successful as a leader, you must know the values of your organization and live by them. You’ve got to walk the talk. Don’t be like so many leaders who stumble and mumble by saying one thing and doing another. When you embody the values you profess, you become the kind of leader that others gladly follow.