

LEADERSHIP

Leadership may be the single most important attribute in achieving success. Good leaders concentrate on motivation, inspiration, and pride. They help subordinates make substantive improvements in the way they work. Quality leadership is not merely cheerleading.

And, Leadership is not synonymous with management excellence. Managers tend to focus on standards, rules and numbers. Successful leaders will employ these principles, but good managers are not necessarily strong leaders.

Contrary to popular belief, leaders are not born to lead . . . yet it can not be learned from books or from the study of others . . .

although observing the traits and actions of role models can help.

Followers can become leaders given the occasion to express themselves for others . . . and I believe that is the job of the true leader. A good leader inspires others with confidence in him or her; a great leader inspires them with confidence in themselves.

There is not a great body of scholarly research available on leadership but in the work that is available everyone is quite in agreement on what are the main ingredients of effective leadership: They are integrity, intelligence, loyalty, discipline, self-sufficiency, courage, a sense of humor and above all, confidence. There are a couple of other secondary characteristics that are usually also found in true leaders and those include, vision, mystique and high levels of energy.

Also, effective leaders simply don't think about failure—don't even use the word. In other words, they always put their energies into walking the tightrope, not into falling. Believe me, “the power of positive thinking” is not corny—it really works. The leader always approaches a challenge with “why I can do this...”, not “why it won't work.”

I have twenty tenants of leadership I have come up with over the years that I would like to share with you today. They are not in any particular order of importance or priority as I have added to the list from time to time—and even removed components on occasion. After I review my list I would like a general discussion and hope that you can add others to the list.

1. Quality leadership is setting the example you want others to follow.

Managers should regularly ask themselves, “Do I want my subordinates to copy my actions; do I preach one story and practice another; am I leading my followers down the ‘right’ path?” Obviously, good managers lead by setting the example.

2. Leaders communicate.

Complete communications in a program can make it more effective and efficient. When the senior managers constantly play “hide the ball” with their subordinates, they actually make their own jobs harder because those who feel left out may not work to their full potential.

Although there are numerous ways to improve communications, the applicability of each will depend somewhat on the size of the program, but in any event, regular staff or “team” meetings are extremely important—and each person on the staff needs to be involved in appropriate meeting(s).

In addition, managers must tell their subordinates how they expect them to develop—and this includes being willing to point out areas that need improvement.

Unfortunately, there are a lot of folks who feel that withholding information gives them “power.” I am sure you have all had to deal with someone like that at some point in your career!

3. Leaders listen.

A big part of the skill of effective communication is in attentive listening—particularly to subordinates. Some think listening is “letting the inmates run the prison,” but under the philosophy of TQM we know that effective listening is thoughtfully considering the ideas and proposals of subordinates. It is pro-actively seeking out innovations—and new ways of doing things.

Remember. No manager, no matter how brilliant or experienced, knows all the answers.

Also, reward staff when their ideas are implemented. Explain why their proposals work or why they will not or cannot be adopted. Follow-up communications are extremely important to reinforcing the value of staff input.

4. Leadership is setting goals.

Planning for the future of a program significantly increases the probability it will follow the right course. As Denise just pointed out, “If you don't know where you are going any road will get you there!”

Setting goals also involves monitoring them and even adjusting as the situation changes.

5. Leading is loving your work.

One cannot lead while constantly griping or whining about problems in the office. Negativism merely breeds unhappiness and dissatisfaction. It can quickly set an office on a destructive, downward spiral of low moral. A leader accentuates the

positive—and when suggesting ideas for change or improvement does it without being negative.

When we do event evaluations, ie VPMI, Art From The Heart, Hospice, etc. we first review “what was good about the event,” and then “what can be improved.” Not, “what was wrong.”

When you approach “improvement” from a positive standpoint you create an entirely different atmosphere.

And, it is particularly important in the philanthropy business for a leader to have a real passion for the organization and its mission and values.

6. A leader constantly strives to improve the program.

. . . and improvement often means change. Systematic planning, of course, is the most outstanding way to improve a program—and that includes evaluating past performance as part of the planning process. Case in point, the VPMI Evaluation process as just discussed.

However, improvement should not be limited to only the planning process. Good ideas should be recognized and implemented as soon as possible after they surface.

7. Leaders “stick to their knitting.”

This is right out of Peters and Waterman's *In Search of Excellence* and emphasizes that leaders should pay attention to their prime responsibilities before they launch new undertakings. Clearly, leaders need to be creative and innovative and expose

new approaches, but they need to make sure they get the basics right before delving into new challenges.

8. Leaders establish standards for their office or organization.

Leaders do NOT expect staff or volunteers to have a crystal ball from which they can define the manager's expectations. Leaders first decide what these standards should be and then communicate them to everyone else. It is unrealistic to expect subordinates to follow nonexistent standards—and as stated in the first point, leaders adhere to those standards at all times, as an example to others.

9. Leaders delegate, but do not abdicate.

This is one of my favorites: A leader cannot and should not do everything. He or she delegates tasks . . . AND authority . . . to others. The delegating manager is not, however, relieved of the ultimate responsibility. Leaders stand behind their subordinates but are always there to provide guidance as needed.

Leaders must tolerate mistakes as long as they are not repeated, and as long as subordinates learn important lessons from each one. Expecting perfection is to expect super-human performance; however, tolerating sloppy thinking and casual attention to matters is to invite disaster and chaos. Leaders take the blame but share the credit!

10. Leaders stand ready, willing and able to do anything they ask their subordinates to do.

The most successful leaders are usually those who themselves have done what they ask their subordinates to undertake. Those are the leaders with the highest credibility. These individuals do not set higher standards for their subordinates than they set for themselves. Almost always, they set the highest standards for their own performance first, then ask their subordinates to follow their own examples.

Some very simple examples: Managers who come late to work and leave early on a regular basis surely cannot expect their staff to adhere to the proper working schedule.

11. Leaders have an absolute devotion to excellence.

Again, this is right out of *In Search of Excellence*. Leaders strive to meet the highest standards possible. We have seen that

when “quality is job one,” it becomes a pursuit that produces amazing results. Ford Motor Company has risen significantly by putting this credo in place—and we are certainly starting to see this pay off for HFHS as we are more and more being acknowledged nationally for our leadership in the Quality Management of health care.

Those of you who have had the full Q101 courses know that to achieve quality you must “delight your customers.” Let me tell you about the disappointment I had Friday when the Lead Group didn't “delight me”—and we are a BIG customer of theirs!

12. Leaders recognize the enormous value of being fair.

Being fair involves a number of concepts. It includes the sometimes difficult task of being candid and honest. It sometimes involves telling subordinates that they are not as

good, or performing as well, as they think they are. It is doing this in the most objective, non-personal way possible.

Still, being fair is difficult, particularly when the person you are criticizing is trying as hard as he or she is able. In almost every case, however, it is the right thing to do over the long term.

Fortunately, honesty always pays. However, leaders are sensitive and are as protective as possible of the feelings of their subordinates.

13. Leaders recognize and reward the meritorious.

All of us like to be praised—it makes us feel accepted and secure. But leaders must find ways to distinguish the truly meritorious performers from those who do an acceptable but less than distinguished job. Too often we fall in the trap of making a

big deal over someone “just doing their job.” Your pay check is the reward for “just doing the job.” The merit increases, special accolades, special recognition, etc. is for going above and beyond. Challenging the “best and brightest” is one of the strongest motivators for everyone else. It will push everyone toward the highest degree of excellence.

14. Leaders have an ability to get the best from each individual subordinate.

Leaders know how to push subordinates to new challenges that they have a reasonable chance of conquering. They understand that the best performers thrive on challenge, and profit and grow from it—and so do the people around them. Like a star that throws out its bright light, everything close to it shares the glow.

Leaders know that mediocrity—even stagnation—can occur without challenge.

Leaders constantly encourage each immediate subordinate to re-examine conventional solutions and question the accepted way of doing things. “Robot” subordinates cannot be creative. Sure, they can produce but cannot be innovative or improve programs. In the long run, they are not assets to the Team.

15. Leaders develop consensus and get everyone pulling in the same direction.

Leaders recognize that long-range planning can help develop a consensus in a program so that everyone is working toward the same goals. That is what we are trying to do here. (And, of course you have to share your goals or you do not have a

common purpose—that is why we have gone through this exercise today).

16. Leaders are decisive, yet fair.

Individuals who procrastinate and take forever to make a decision, or who “waffle” after one is made have a hard time leading. On the other hand, those who are arbitrary in their decisions, no matter how quickly they make them, also have trouble being effective leaders. Effective leaders make decisions that are fair, yet do not take so much time as to significantly dilute their effectiveness.

“Waffling” and changing one’s mind after new information, etc. is received, are too different things. Often, you just need the courage to make the decision and move on. You can usually

make some alterations down the road, but if you make NO decision, you ain't gonna go anywhere—at least you won't be going the way you necessarily want as someone will surely make that decision for you.

I will admit, that if I were to prioritize these “tenets,” this would be way at the top. If you are unwilling to make decisions then you are not a leader. It is as simple as that. Think about it.

Who do you go to when you cannot make up your mind:

Someone you respect, someone you know who can make that decision. That person is a leader.

17. Leaders are risk-takers.

Every great accomplishment or innovation that history chronicles was achieved, for the most, because someone was willing to take a risk. Except for perhaps the invention of

“yellow sticky notes.” That was definitely by accident! (And, I am sure there are a few other examples.)

The point is, one of the main characteristics of a true leader is courage—and without courage a person will not take a risk—will not be willing to stick out his or her neck.

And not only are leaders “risk takers,” they encourage and reward their subordinates who are willing to take risks. This often takes even more courage because the true leader will accept the “flack” for the subordinates failures but then let’s the subordinate take the credit for the successes!

18. Leaders are team players.

Just because one is “in the lead” doesn't mean you cannot also be part of the team. All teams need a leader—and that person can be different in differing situations

19. Leaders must set high ethical standards—and that is particularly so in the field of philanthropy.

Having high ethical standards is not only right, more importantly, it is highly satisfactory for all who are involved. The establishment of the highest ethical standards must come from those at the top—and true leaders live by those standards.

20. Leaders recognize that one's reputation is their most valuable quality.

This pertains to both an individual and to an organization. Many of the other leadership principles relate to reputation, ie. being fair, ethical and a team player. And, leaders recognize that their

reputation for being honest is their most valuable asset—along with the other characteristics just covered.

Leadership is an invisible strand as mysterious as it is powerful.

It pulls and it bonds. It is a catalyst that creates unity out of disorder. No combination of talents can guarantee it and no process or training can create it where the spark does not exist.

Leadership ability is not the innate characteristic of only the privileged few. The qualities of leadership are universal; they are found in the poor and the rich, the humble and the proud, the common man or woman, and the brilliant thinker. But, wherever they are found, leaders make things happen.

In closing let me quote Jim Fisher, former President of CASE and author of the book, *The Power of the Presidency*:

“Leadership is the special quality that enables people to stand up and pull the rest of us over the horizon.”