

## Exceptional Leadership Inspires the Best Effort in Others

There is a steady stream being written and taught about leadership these days. There are tips about leadership, courses about leadership, books, retreats, and continuing education - all focused on leadership. While all of this material is useful and can certainly enhance one's leadership knowledge, for the most part it avoids asking and answering two questions:

1. Why does better leadership make a difference? , and
2. How does better leadership achieve those differences?

We all know we're "supposed" to work to be better leaders, but why does it matter, what impact does it have, and how does this all work?

Whenever I ask the "Why" question, the answers that come to the mind of most people are something like "better leadership creates more productivity, higher profits, lower turnover, greater job satisfaction, more loyalty... you get the picture. But these responses bring us to the *real* question which is, "How does better leadership create those things? How does being a better leader lead to more productivity, higher profits, lower turnover, greater job satisfaction, more loyalty?" It is the answers to these two questions which elevate us from simply learning and understanding better leadership principles to pursuing a course of action which transforms us and our leadership abilities into something that really makes a difference.

I often suggest that my clients use their own experience as their best example. Ask yourself when, during your career, you felt the most satisfied, most productive, proudest, most focused, and most committed. When we reflect back on those times, most of us would acknowledge that we didn't feel like we did because our "leader" had made a good decision, or that they had gone through "leadership training" (That term is in quotes because leaders need to be developed, not trained.), or that their leaders were efficient, met their goals, or had success in the past. No, typically we felt the way we did (satisfied, productive, proud, focused, and committed) because of what we did - what we accomplished. It all comes back to us and how we felt. It's generally not about anything external - it comes down to our emotions. The key to exceptional leadership, therefore, lies within our ability to relate effectively with people and their emotions.

Imagine if everyone at work felt satisfied, productive, proud, focused, and committed! What would the consequences be? The consequences would be that everyone would create greater productivity, higher profits, lower turnover, greater job satisfaction, and more loyalty! The key then, to better performance, is helping people feel more satisfied, productive, proud, focused, and committed. Notice the absence of any technical or intelligence issues? Notice that we've haven't brought up the idea of "motivating" people? We haven't touched on motivating people for one simple reason... people can't be motivated! Trying to motivate someone is analogous to physically trying to get them to do something they don't want to do. You won't succeed. What really works is when we're *self-motivated* - when we do something because we *want* to. When we're inspired, we enjoy our work. We're productive and proud of our efforts. We remain focused and committed to the task at hand. In short, we put forth our best effort.

Exceptional leadership, therefore, is leadership that inspires people to give their best effort. Although, for a leader, being productive and having good time management skills are important and necessary, they are not sufficient. Having good judgment becomes increasingly important the higher in an organization we rise, however it too is insufficient for truly effective leadership. Exceptional leadership is about relating to people in such a way as to inspire them to give their best effort - for themselves, their organization, their community, their family, and/or their world.

How is this accomplished? The foundation of exceptional leadership - of inspiring others - comprises three areas - **Effective Leadership Philosophies** (for yourself and your organization), **Effective Purpose, Mission and Values**, and **Effective People Skills**.

#### \* EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP PHILOSOPHIES

**Leading by Example** - Whether we acknowledge it or not, we always lead by example. In our words (what we say or don't say), in our actions (what we do or don't do), and in our expressions (what we show or don't show). The things we do and say, during moments of "apparent insignificance", make an impression on those around us.

**Servant Leader Philosophies** - In our leadership workshops, I'll ask participants who the most important person is to a company. The answer, of course, is the customer. The question that follows next is, "Who is the most important person in the company to that customer?" Most people get that the person most important to the customer is the one they come in contact with - the "frontline". The question that follows is the real key to a better understanding of servant leadership. This question is, "What, then, is the job of the manager of those frontline people?" The job of the managers of the frontline folks is to make their job as easy and as effective as possible so that the customer has the best experience possible! If this leadership philosophy is adopted throughout an organization, it ends up with an organizational chart that looks like an inverted pyramid. It is an organization that acknowledges the importance of the frontline and reflects the philosophy of service throughout.

#### \* EFFECTIVE PURPOSE, MISSION AND VALUES

An organization which inspires the best effort in its people will attract the kind of employees it wants and needs, and will retain them. It has a Purpose, a Mission, and a set of Values that it lives by, it effectively communicates them, and it measures its actions and decisions against them.

- **Purpose** is the "**WHY**" of the equation. It defines why we do what we do. Each decision and policy should take the company closer to achieving its "WHY". When a company has a clearly defined purpose it begins to act as a magnet, attracting the kind of people who will further the purpose; people who are like-minded. Not only will having a purpose attract the right people, but it will also act to retain them.

- **Mission** is the "**WHAT**" of the equation. It defines what the company will be doing to achieve its Purpose. A mission can be fairly narrow or be somewhat broad. However, one that is too narrow can unduly restrict an organization from considering opportunities that would otherwise be an excellent fit and one that is too broad offers no guidance at all.

- **Values** are the "**HOW**" of the equation. Values define how the Mission will be carried out in an effort to achieve the Purpose. They define the "rules of the game". Some of them will come to mind quite easily, things like honesty, courtesy, kindness, and ethics. But some other important values will only surface when brainstorming takes place - when different perspectives and voices are heard.

#### \* EFFECTIVE PEOPLE SKILLS

I'll often ask clients or workshop attendees for the traits of the best boss they ever had and the traits of the worst boss. Inevitably, I'll get answers like: (Best) respected my ideas, worked to develop me, challenged me, listened, empowered me and let me make my own mistakes,... and (Worst) micro-managed, was overly demanding, poor communicator, mistrustful, ... What's interesting is that in no case were the technical skills or the intelligence of a boss either praised or condemned. All the notable traits, both good and bad, had to do with people skills.

The goal of effective people skills is good Relationship Management. Relationship Management encompasses the ability to develop others, inspire others, influence others, resolve conflict, and build teamwork and collaboration.

## **CONCLUSION**

The essence of exceptional leadership is the ability to inspire the best effort in others. When people choose to give their best effort, satisfaction increases, pride develops, innovation is born, productivity improves, stability prevails, and profitability increases. The keys to a highly performing organization are creating an inspiring environment and personally becoming an exceptional leader. We can create an inspiring environment by adopting effective leadership philosophies and clarifying a Purpose, Mission and set of Values. We can personally become a more effective leader by honing and acquiring effective people skills. Become a leader who inspires the best effort in others.

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