

Is Your Leadership Is Effective?

In many ways, good leadership is hard to define. It can't be directly measured. There's no leadership "score" or report card. In fact often the measure of leadership is qualitative rather than quantitative - although quantitative results always follow. So, the questions remains, ***how can you tell if your leadership skills are effective?***

Plain and simple, leadership is about getting others to take action. If leadership effectiveness is lacking, less than best effort is put forth. The better the leadership, the better the effort. **Exceptional leadership inspires the best effort in others.**

Effective leadership is a function of both individual competencies and organizational culture. What are some signs that leadership isn't as effective as it could be? There are a number of them. They are indications that something is missing in the leadership equation.

- Inability to Motivate People
- Difficulty Attracting/Retaining the Right People
- Low Productivity
- Poor Customer Orientation
- High Stress
- Isolation
- Declining Profits
- Ineffective Delegation
- Lack of Creativity
- Lack of Initiative
- Ineffective Teams
- Poor Communications
- Lack of Vision
- Diminishing Revenues
- High Turnover

What can be done to improve leadership effectiveness? The answer is simple to understand and yet not so simple to implement. It starts with understanding the foundations of what makes someone an effective leader and what kind of organizational culture is most effective.

Effective Personal Leadership

When I ask workshop participants about characteristics of both good and bad leaders, ***the list never includes issues of intelligence, technical skills, or effective decision-making!*** Instead, the list is full of people-related traits - good listener, respectful, good communicator, develops others, ...

Effective personal leadership can be summarized as being competent in these skill sets:

- ***Becoming Influential***
- ***Facilitating Teamwork & Collaboration***
- ***Being a Catalyst for Change***
- ***Managing Conflict***
- ***Developing Others***
- ***Having & Communicating a Compelling Vision***

Unfortunately, improving one's competency in these areas is often a challenge. Let me explain why...

Unlike factual information, which gets processed in the neo-cortex of the brain, people-related skills are processed in part of the brain called the amygdala. This portion of the brain regulates emotional insights and responses rather than logical insights and responses. Improving the leadership skills set forth above require one to break old habits/responses and form new ones, and we aren't able to do this simply by learning and acquiring knowledge. That's the difference between the neo-cortex and the amygdala.

There are a couple of inherent challenges with this process. Pretty much everyone acknowledges that they have room for improvement. The first challenge is knowing which areas to improve. We all have blind spots. We're aware of some of our shortcomings, but usually not all of them. Secondly, breaking habits and forming new ones requires commitment, persistence, and time. It usually takes support from others - people who can point out when you've acted in a way contradictory to your intent. It's important to use a reliable assessment to identify areas of growth opportunity. From those results, we can develop a plan of development which bolsters weaker areas and leverages stronger areas. The final aspect of a successful personal development plan relies on having one or more people who can support you, give unbiased, non-judgmental feedback, and help you make course corrections.

Organizational Culture

The foundations of a strong organization are:

1. Developing a clear and compelling **Purpose**
2. Identifying the organization's **Mission** to achieve the Purpose
3. Agreeing on a set of **Values** by which to carry out the Mission
4. Adopting a **Servant Leader** attitude throughout the organization

An organization's **Purpose** is the "Why" of its existence. It's not what it does as much as what it is striving to accomplish. It is a statement of the greater good it is attempting to achieve. It answers the question: "Why are we here?" and helps give clarity and focus to each person in the organization. It is the yardstick by which decisions are measured.

An organization's **Mission** is the "What" of an organization. It is a definition of what the company does to achieve its stated **Purpose**. It begins to define the core proficiencies of a business and helps keep it focused on achieving its Purpose.

An organization's set of **Values** is the "How" of an organization. It defines what an organization most values in the execution of its **Mission**. It's not an all encompassing list of possible values as much as a statement of what the organization most values in its people and their conduct. It defines behaviors and culture within an organization. It helps set the guidelines of what is and is not acceptable.

At the core of **Servant Leadership** is the premise that the customer is the most important person to the organization. As a consequence of that premise, it only follows that the most important people to the customer are the frontline staff. They're the people who customers interact with on a daily basis. This understanding leads to the philosophy that the job of the manager of the frontline people is to make their jobs as easy and effective as possible so the customer has the best experience possible. The result is an organizational chart that looks like an inverted pyramid. This servant attitude focuses leaders on developing those around them. It leads to people working together in a collaborative, solution-oriented environment.

How does one go about developing Purpose, Mission, and Values? Falling back on our understanding of Servant Leadership and the importance of everyone in the organization, the

creation of Purpose, Mission and Values requires input from people in all areas of the company. They (the Purpose, Mission, and Values) need to be relevant to all involved, they need to be consistent with one another, and they need to be used consistently as a yardstick for decisions and policies. There's nothing worse than developing Values and just paying them lip-service by not living them day-to-day. A practice like that lacks integrity and actually becomes a demoralizer.

In summary, when we combine personal competency in all areas of leadership skills with an organizational culture which supports people, their development, and their success, we end up with exceptional leadership which, in turn, inspires the best effort in others.

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