

## **BEING A LEADER**

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Today's non-profit organizations are struggling with economic factors that produce a climate of layoffs, wage stagnation, expanded responsibilities and limited opportunities for worker advancement. For many workers and their families the future appears uncertain. Staff at all levels feel overworked and underpaid. Organizations are downsizing. Fewer middle managers will be needed and the work of managers has become more complex. In this climate, morale is often low and service delivery can falter. Good leadership is one ingredient that can make a difference.

### **LEADERSHIP MATTERS**

Good leadership improves morale and strengthens task completion by inspiring confidence in stressful times. Supervisors, CEO's, managers, and presidents of boards are all interested in basic questions about leadership. What is leadership? What qualities enable leaders to fulfill the the organization's vision and mission? Can leadership be developed?

### **WHAT IS LEADERSHIP?**

Leadership is the ability to bring people together to dedicate themselves to the pursuit of a common goal. First and foremost, leaders get things done. Leaders are known by their accomplishments. Consider a few: Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Lee

Iacoco, Eleanor Roosevelt, Angela Davis. We know these people because of what they have accomplished and how these accomplishments changed our world.

Stephen Covey writes that “Leadership focuses on the top line. Management focuses on the bottom line.” While managers focus on the numbers, leaders focus on people. Team building and vision are the core of leadership. Leadership is about building peak performing teams, teams focused on accomplishing goals. The key elements are: communicate and motivate.

## **ASSESSING LEADERS**

How do you know whether or not the people in positions of authority in your organization are good leaders? How do you know who to choose for management and leadership positions.

To begin with, leadership style must match the organization and its task. For example, the army, police departments and sports teams respond best to task-oriented, authoritative styles of leadership. Human service organizations respond to a leadership style focusing on process, participation and interaction. Educational organizations respond to informed and informative leadership.

Personality variables are another important factor. According to a research report in *American Psychologist*, charismatic leaders have a vision. They are able to recruit people who share their vision, and the relationships they develop with members of their team enable leaders to persuade the whole group to work together toward their shared vision. Psychological research has uncovered the following positive personality variables associated with strong leadership: warmth, friendliness, self-confidence, ability to stand

up to pressure. The absence of the negative qualities of arrogance, hostility, boastfulness, egotism, and passivity are correlated with positive leadership. In addition, aggressive and dictatorial leaders are associated with poor team performance.

Not everyone in a supervisory or management position is a leader, nor is every worker a potential supervisor or manager. Potential leaders in non-supervisory positions are those who work hard, support their peers, and are often asked to speak with managers on behalf of their group. They are goal-directed and they believe in the organization and in their co-workers.

Today's leaders must be knowledgeable about diversity in the workplace. The predictions of Workforce 2000 are becoming a reality. Supervisors in the 21st Century must be culturally competent. They need to understand the diverse needs of the diverse populations with whom they work, and their staff must feel listened to, respected and understood. Leaders of today's diverse organizations must be able to motivate staff members to work together for a common purpose, The common purpose is ultimately the central task or goal of the organization, whether it is building good cars or educating children.

Leadership can also be assessed by looking at what's wrong and what's missing in an organization. Is there a mission statement for the organization or team? Is there a strategic plan? Do members of the organization know the mission and where they fit in the strategic plan or are these buried in a file or the CEO's drawer?

High turnover rates, insubordination, poor service delivery and high rates of interpersonal disputes are typical signs of weak leadership. Poor leaders play politics,

micromanage, are unable to delegate, and unable to make decisions. Poor leaders lack integrity and are not trusted by those who work for them.

In the past, managers were evaluated based on the performance of their unit in the organization, and the ratings of their supervisors. Today, these methods are being expanded to include ratings of “subordinates” and peers. Evaluations by peers and those who are supervised are also sought and are used to assess the performance and progress of organizational leaders. These kinds of circular evaluations give a more robust and realistic picture of leadership assessment.

## **LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

Leadership development is a central focus of organizational and community development programs. According to the New York Times, (4/28/96) eight hundred colleges teach courses in leadership studies, and six out of ten companies find leadership development a high priority.

Organizational and human development consultants and companies offer many kinds of services to strengthen the leadership qualities of supervisors and managers. Administrative consultation and executive coaching help leaders who are may be faltering or may simply want to maximize their skills. Coaching is done one on one and can include just a single meeting between supervisor and coach or can cover a span of time (six months to a year) so that the coach can enhance the long-range leadership qualities of the manager or supervisor. The coach or consultant may be asked to sit in on team meetings or other activities where he can assess the supervisor’s fit with the organizational unit. Some organizations maintain their own leadership development

programs, often managed by Personnel or Staff Development departments. In these programs, talented staff with potential are chosen and mentored over a period of time.

Leadership training is another component of leadership development. Training can last anywhere from a day to a week. An organization can hire a consultant to do leadership training with its staff or it can send its staff to leadership training centers where workers from many organizations come together to learn. Leadership training often includes an assessment of participants' leadership qualities. Participants may be evaluated by the trainers, by fellow participants and by questionnaires filled out by a manager's subordinates. Evaluations are usually presented and discussed in private meetings with one of the trainers.

While leadership training cannot change a person's basic character, it can inform and strengthen supervisors who have basic integrity, competence and people skills. Training, consultation and coaching build skills that help managers to advance the competence and spirit of the entire team. Good leaders do their homework. They are effective at setting goals, inspiring shared vision, building strong teams and creating a productive climate where staff can grow personally and professionally while accomplishing group goals. All of these characteristics, together with the ability to inspire confidence, are the qualities of the best leaders. If you can do these things, you will make a difference!

## **Peak Performance Leaders**

- 1. Do their homework.**
- 2. Keep the “Common Good” in mind.**
- 3. Treat each person as an individual.**
- 4. Have a vision.**
- 5. Seek win/win solutions.**
- 6. Hold self and others accountable.**

### **Read More About Leadership!**

Steven Covey, The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People.

Laurie Beth Jones, Jesus CEO: Using Ancient Wisdom for Visionary Leadership.

Steven Covey. Principle Centered Leadership.

Fast Company Magazine. April/May 1996

What We Know About Leadership by Robert Hogan, et.al. in American Psychologist  
June 1994.