



JOURNEYMAN LEADERSHIP

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"Leadership" is a concept so often shrouded in myth and legend that it becomes difficult to understand in the context of everyday events. Charismatic leaders in particular, such as Martin Luther King, Jr. or J.F.K., create a larger-than-life mystique. This mystique clouds the notion of leadership by focusing on leaders as unique individuals, instead of understanding leadership as a means of advancing the common goals of a group. Since effective leadership is a critical component of a well-run business, it is valuable to define as a means of advancing a set of common goals.

For a moment, let's consider leadership as the practice of a set of skills, as opposed to a position of authority. Practicing leadership in a business setting is a means of advancing the goals of the organization and is as important and fundamental as getting the bills out at the end of the month. Leadership in a firm facilitates transition away from the status quo and assists to transform the structure, culture, and politics of an organization toward some envisioned future state. By evaluating the components of successful leadership, it is possible to dismantle the mystique, identify some of the skills of the trade, and consider leadership as a journeyman's practice. However, describing a foundation of skills as a journeyman's practice is not meant to imply that leadership is an unexceptional talent of the rank and file. Rather, it is meant to imply that leadership does not lie in the domain of famous personalities and star players alone.

The Components of Leadership

What are the components of effective leadership? Exercising leadership means providing a vision and mobilizing others to realize that vision through non-coercive means. (1) A foundation for effective leadership may be built by asking a set of questions which allow a vision of the desired future state to be clearly articulated, and then choosing a means of communicating the vision which motivates followers. Leadership is also a function of personal style, and may tend to be more or less charismatic or structured depending on the preference, inclination, and abilities of the individual delivering the message.

Creation of the Vision

The vision defined is often more aspirational than inspirational. It involves an objective assessment of what is unsatisfactory with the status quo and sets a goal for the future. The vision operates on a number of fronts in order to define and achieve this desired future state. The vision is:

An original idea: The vision may be a distinctly new idea, however, is not always or inherently so. It may simply be an acknowledged issue or existing platform reframed in a new context. Regardless, it generally brings an original perspective to the future of the firm which is in contrast to the status quo; it may offer critique, but is forward-looking.

Desirable to a range of stakeholders: The vision appeals to all of the parties influencing the future of the firm including employees, clients, consultants, contractors, bankers, and others. This is not to say that anyone other than the members of the firm establish the vision; rather, that the incentives for others to buy-in to the vision need to be considered.

Clear and understandable: Language can reinforce boundaries which often already exist due to the level of authority or experience of the individual in the leadership role. Familiar, common use of language encourages follower buy-in.

Feasible: Implementation of the vision must be within reach. Loose coupling between the commitment to achieve the vision and the values communicated by the leader rapidly erodes the power and credibility of the message. Leaders have to "walk the talk." The vision must be reasonable, consistent with the values demonstrated by the leader, achievable, and observable through measurable results.

The Act of Leading

The act of leading involves conveying the vision to an audience of followers. If there is to be a charismatic and inspirational step in the process, this is it. However, more structured forms of leadership are equally appropriate, and at times even more effective. The act of leading:

Communicates the vision: Promotion of the vision in the interest of achieving buy-in from followers is perhaps the most important task the leader has to perform. The prospect of organizational change provokes stress by defining the problem and identifying the need to alter the status quo. Repeated and consistent communication of the vision as well as easy access to the leader and the message reduces stress and avoids the misinterpretation of intentions.

Articulates the message in a way people understand: Successful promotion of the vision means finding a way of communicating which will be embraced by the stakeholders. One way of achieving this is through the use of vivid language. Symbolic language and the use of metaphors amplifies the values and beliefs embedded in the vision. Illustration of the vision in a way that has strong appeal to followers encourages understanding.

Empowers the audience: Creating a structure for the ownership of the vision by the followers is essential to the success of the change effort. Delegation of

responsibility and the assumption of accountability by others promotes buy-in and generates commitment. An action plan with clear responsibilities and milestones conveys ownership to followers.

Mobilizes resources: Coaching and assistance are required in order to get people on board. The leadership role includes seeking solutions to obstacles, finding the tools to implement the vision, and helping others succeed in doing the same.

Styles of Leadership

Many factors influence the personal style of the individual delivering the message. Effective leaders demonstrate knowledge, enthusiasm, persistence, sensitivity, and a sense of humor among an array of other traits. A range of possible leadership styles exists between transactional leadership, or one which tends to be structured and defined, and transformational leadership, which tends to be charismatic and inspirational.

Transactional leadership involves an agreement between the leader and the followers which promises reward upon attainment of a clearly defined goal. Achieving the goal is dependent upon following a prescribed path. Directions and assistance for achieving the goal are provided. An implicit contract exists between the leader and the followers. The contract, when paraphrased, says "If you provide this set of results, I will reward you." Structured leadership has less potential to get people up off their feet and the relationship between leader and follower is relatively businesslike; however, it tends to stand the test of time. Transactional leadership is less critical of the status quo and less passionate than charismatic leadership; however, in being so, it is also less open to assault and less dependent upon the personality and passion of the leader for success of the vision.

Transformational leadership evokes a response from followers which transcends the status quo. The thinking and feelings of the followers undergo a change reflecting the envisioned future state. Transformational leaders tend to be passionate communicators with the ability to articulate the vision in vivid terms, painting pictures with words and gestures. They hold high expectations for follower performance and communicate high confidence in follower success. Transformational leaders are often charismatic and tend to inspire motivation and action among followers. Maintaining the magic can be a challenge for this style of leadership. Additionally, the presence of a powerful personality can disenfranchise those nearest the leader whose advocacy and authority are critical to achieving the goals.

Conclusion

Leadership is a catalyst and facilitator for organizational change. However, leadership in the context of firm management is often the systematic

implementation of a set of skills - rather more like making the decision to fill the paper cassette in the copier than like crossing the Alps with elephants. Successful leadership in its simplest form involves making a decision which affects a group of people and acting upon that decision in order to accomplish the desired result. The final measure of effective leadership is whether or not it stands the test of time. Only after time is it possible to determine whether any changes achieved have simply been the result of low-hanging fruit, or if in fact, leadership has been effectively employed in achieving organizational change.

By looking beyond the aura of celebrated personalities and compelling orators, a foundation of skills for effective leadership may be developed. Whether structured, charismatic, or some other combination of styles, articulating the vision in a way that is understandable and empowering is the essence of effective leadership. Asking the right questions in order to define the vision and clearly communicating the message are the fundamental skills of journeyman leadership.

(1) Heifetz, R., *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1994