

Thought Leadership In HR

The traits of a true leader

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A manager is one who gets results through other people by making them successful. A leader is one who focuses the desire for change that's resident within others and who then facilitates the creation of a sustainable new reality.

People often talk about what makes a great leader, much of it focusing on the characteristics and traits, the strategies and styles and even on the special values and perspectives of leaders. The inevitable conclusion to be drawn is that there are as many different approaches to the role as there are people and opportunities.

It's very hard to disprove any hypothesis or theory completely for every one of them seems to carry a grain of truth. At the end of the day, leadership successes will continue to surprise us. Just when we thought we had it all pegged, someone makes the case for a completely different perspective, strategy or qualification that we had not even considered.

Leaders come in all shapes and sizes. The toughest questions to answer are:

- “Just how do you become a leader?”
- “What are the specific things you need to do to be an excellent leader?”

There are three fundamental areas where effective leaders differentiate themselves from competent managers, namely in how they use information, in their perspective — or point of focus — and finally in their preparedness to invest.

1. Information usage: Leaders are able to shift their perspectives from cognitive competencies (knowledge, skills and experience) to wisdom (comprehension, appreciation and value). They can relate comfortably to the essential differences between ‘knowing’ something and ‘understanding’ it.

They tend not to value information for its own sake, as a cerebral asset that is acquired with heavy investments of time, effort and discomfort. Instead, they view information simply as a pathway to understanding, appreciation and mutual benefit, something to be shared, cultured and traded openly.

2. Perspective: Leaders are able to move their viewpoint from self-awareness to ‘other’- awareness. Instead of their primary concern being on what and how they feel, what’s in it for them and what personal consequences might ensue, they first assess others’ realities individually / collectively— before they act.

This does not mean that they are being altruistic and selfless but rather that they recognize two ‘truths’ - that value is created between and among people not within one’s self, and that change is best leveraged through collaborative efforts in a ‘win-win’ scenario. They are perceived to be pragmatic and open in their strategies and transparent and trustworthy in their interactions.

3. Investment: Leaders are always ready to invest - especially in other people, relationships and in future conditions. They work from the vantage point of desired solutions back to the action that’s required now, rather than from desires, intentions and problems to needed outcomes — which is a manager’s viewpoint.

The concept of investment also indicates that leaders are willing to defer instant gratification in return for increased and improved future options which can be a shared experience with mutual benefits. They see real value as a commodity that is created through the combining of multiple efforts, not as something that can be imposed upon or demanded of others.

They're prepared to contribute now in return for future gain.

FIVE LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES:

1. Use knowledge, skill and experience as a tool rather than as a credential
2. Focus forward, using the past and the present as guidelines, not as realities
3. Make dreams and visions as real as actual experience
4. Balance expectations, both in self and in others
5. Understand that leadership is 'both/and' not 'either/or'

THE LEADER'S PATH

Just about every leader in the history of the world has been energized and empowered by what others have needed and wanted but yet not recognised until the leader provided the focus.

A leader facilitates the creation of options and broadens horizons while a manager selects courses, resources and critical points and then refines actions.

Working on the premise that leaders find their needed energy within others, the initial challenge is to draw that energy out. People want to contribute, to add value, to pursue excellence and to change. The role of the leader is to focus and facilitate this process, not to control it.

Leaders don't own power, they borrow it!

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