

LEADERS ARE MADE! HOW YOU CAN DEVELOP LEADERSHIP ABILITY

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For centuries, the question of whether leaders are born or developed have teased researchers of leadership. In a recent dissertation on this subject, Tracy Gibbons (1986) came to this conclusion, "Leaders . . . (have a) predisposition established early in their lives which is reinforced and augmented throughout their lives. It could be said that they are developmentally oriented, in that most have devoted considerable time and effort to their individual, intrapersonal development, and they appear, therefore, to be functioning at higher levels of psychological development" (p. 204).

This paper will identify some of the current concepts of leadership and identify the critical skills, abilities, attitudes, and qualities needed meet each of these concepts. This paper is designed to help leaders assess their present level of ability and identify further developmental goals that will enhance their leadership. Gibbons' (1986) research states that leaders have done more inter and intrapersonal work on themselves. Therefore, I will organize the current concepts about leadership into two categories; inner work: connections with self and inner-personal work: connections with others.

Inter-Personal Work: Connections with Others

Our understanding of leadership has evolved over the years. It was first thought of as a set of traits people were born with. It then looked at leadership as situational (matching different styles to different situations), organizational (a function of a position and role responsibility), power (leadership is having and using power to get things done), visionary (creating a vision for a future direction), and ethical (leadership decisions are based in an ethical framework and is used to enhance the human community). Leadership is probably a combination of all of these. In my reading and research, the following concepts consistently appear (Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Burns, 1978; Hagberg, 1984; Kotter, 1988).

Leadership is Relational: Leadership is not attached to a position but is established through the relationship between people. Leadership can be practiced from a position of authority (ex. manager, CEO, etc.) or from a non-position (ex. member, employee, etc.). The following skills and abilities are needed to provide leadership that is relational.

- **Relationship Building and Maintaining Skills:** This includes the ability to identify common ground and develop trust with another. It also includes the ability to sustain and strengthen relationships over time and through conflicts.
- **Networking:** This includes developing a broad set of solid relationships in the field and organization in which one works. It also includes developing an excellent reputation and strong track record in a broad set of activities (Kotter, 1988).
- **Empathy and Awareness of Impact:** Knowing how one's actions affect others and being able to experience and understand the feelings of others (Greenleaf, 1977).
- **Trust:** Being willing to share one's thoughts and feelings (trusting) and be open and accepting to others thoughts and feelings, as well as communicating cooperative intentions (trustworthy).

Leadership is Based on Mutual Goals and Visions: Leadership involves dialogue with followers rather than dictating to them (Burns, 1978). It is critical of the present in that it spots what is missing and through this awareness can develop a vision that will give direction and motivation towards something better (Greenleaf, 1977).

- **Communication Skills:** In order to develop mutual goals and spot what's missing, one must have the ability to **observe, listen, communicate**, and to **empathize** with others. That forms the basis of a leader's awareness. This awareness helps the leader form a vision that is mutually influenced by both

leaders and followers. Then the leader uses communication skills to **articulate** the vision to others (Bennis and Nanus, 1985).

- **Respect for Others:** Leaders are considerate of others. Without this respect, they stop listening and don't dialogue with followers and become raw power wielders. This respect creates the conditions for a heterarchical relationship with followers based on equality. It also guarantees that the vision and goals will be mutually beneficial.

Leadership is Political: Leadership is using power to make a difference (Burns, 1978). Leaders develop multiple power bases (expert, referent, etc.) and also empower others (Hagberg, 1984).

- **Relationship Building:** Referent power is based on feelings of personal affection, loyalty, and admiration by followers (Yukl, 1981). This is enhanced when the leaders are able to build relationships with others.
- **Influencing:** Leadership is change oriented. This means that leaders must learn how to influence others. One means to do this is through expert power (Yukl, 1981). Expert power is built on one's knowledge and expertise in the field, organization, and community in which one's involved (Kotter, 1988).
- **Empowering Others:** Leadership shares power with others (Hagberg, 1984). This means that leaders need to see power as infinite rather than finite. People who see power as finite think that there is a constant amount of power in the world and if they give any of their power away, they will have less. Therefore, they constantly attempt to get and retain their power. Leaders see power as infinite and the more it is given away (to others) the more it is generated. Other skills that are needed to empower others are coaching/training skills, inspiring others to do more than they thought they could, involving them in decisions, personal recognition, etc.

Leadership is Developmental: Leadership works to develop followers into leaders and leaders into agents of change (Burns, 1978). Therefore, leadership is developmental at its core. It is interested in the type of change that can be handed down generation after generation after the leader(s) is gone. Therefore, others need to be empowered and developed in order to insure the continued pursuit of the collective vision.

- **Teaching through Modeling:** Leaders model their values. They have integrity in that their actions and beliefs reflect one another. Their most powerful teaching tool is their own ability to model the behaviors and values that are consistent with their vision.
- **Empowerment:** They also develop others through challenging others to do more than they thought they could and backing this challenge up with support, encouragement, information, and training others need to succeed.
- **Respect for Others:** Development is not a thing that can be "done to people" without their consent and involvement. Leaders respect for others insures that people will not be treated as means to an end, but as an end in themselves.
- **Power is Seen as Infinite:** As stated before, leaders need to see power as regenerating and infinite so that they will give away their own power in order to empower others.

Inner Work: Connections with Self

There are a variety of skills and abilities that individuals who want to be leaders need to develop from within themselves. Without this "inner work" the leader lacks the consistency, balance, and inner strength needed for the challenges of leadership. Schein in his book, Organizational Culture and Leadership (1985) states that a leader often needs to "... absorb and contain the anxiety that is unleashed when things do not work as they should. The leader may not have the answer, but he must provide temporary stability and emotional reassurance while the answer is being worked out" (p. 318).

He further stated that when an established group is going through change, it experiences an “unfreezing” of its norms and culture. This causes anxiety among members. This unfreezing requires the “creation of psychological safety, which means that the leader must have the emotional strength to absorb much of the anxiety that change brings with it. The leader must have the ability to remain supportive to the organization through the transition phase even if the group members become angry and obstructive. The leader is likely to be the target of anger and criticism because, by definition, he must challenge some of what the group has taken for granted” (323).

This means that the leaders must work on themselves so that they can sustain the challenges of leadership. I have identified the following areas of inner work for leaders because they relate to present research on leadership.

Leadership is Internal: The motives of leadership are connected to the self. Leadership is value driven and, therefore, comes from the individual’s sense of purpose and values.

- **Sense of Purpose:** The drive to be a leader comes from leaders’ values and life purpose (Burns, 1978). Leaders have developed their own sense of purpose. This purpose connects them with something larger themselves. They can articulate it and live by it.
- **Internal Drive:** Leadership requires initiation because it is change oriented. Leaders have developed the ability to initiate action and develop and maintain a commitment.
- **Value Driven/Ethical:** Leadership raises the question . . . toward what? Therefore, it is value laden. Leaders develop their sense of purpose from what they value. Therefore, they bring values into all their decisions (Block, 1978; Heider, 1985). Leaders align their values with their actions, they will challenge unethical decisions and act ethically even if it is unwise to do so (Hagberg, 1984).

Leadership Involves Risk: Leadership is oriented toward change and, therefore, is tied to risk taking. Leaders have the ability to take a chance and try out new ideas.

- **Inner Strength:** This is needed to live through the conflict that leaders create and live with. It is also needed to absorb the anxiety of change and risk that leaders live with.

Leadership is an Extension of Self: Because leadership is so complex, a leader needs to develop the ability to reflect, as well as act. This involves developing the self in the following areas:

- **Fluidness:** There is an unpredictable quality to leadership. Relationships are always changing. Leadership can’t be put into boxes or organizational charts. Therefore, leaders need to be comfortable with ambiguity and mutual causality. Fluidness helps.
- **Self-Acceptance:** Leaders need to be able to view oneself positively and accept one’s capabilities and handicaps.
- **Realistic Self Appraisal:** Leaders need to be able to realistically measure their strength, weaknesses, and skills.
- **Self Responsibility:** Leaders don’t blame others for the fix they are in. They are willing to be accountable for their actions.
- **Balance:** Leaders feel comfortable enough with themselves that they can draw from a well of strength that will maintain their own balance in difficulties. This balance is drawn from reflection, relationships, self-development, and leisure activities.

Leadership Teaches Through Modeling: The relationship between leaders and followers is personal. Leaders are watched from many levels and their actions will be viewed in symbolic, as well as concrete ways.

- **Personal Integrity:** Leaders need to work toward becoming whole, where their values and actions are one.

Leadership Works with Intangibles: Leaders focus on the emotional and spiritual resources of the organization like values, aspiration, energy, vision, and commitment (Bennis & Nanus, 1985).

- **Personal Awareness:** Leaders need to develop their awareness to see things in the intangible, as well as the tangible realm.
- **Visionary:** Leaders need to develop an ability to create and articulate their own visions and help others to do the same.
- **Connections of Meaning:** Leaders help others connect their work with the overall vision of the organization. This connecting up of meaning involves developing the ability to identify relationships of component parts to a larger concept, as well as the ability to gather together pieces to form a whole.
- **Spirit:** There is a connection between spirit and results. We see it in the Olympics when an underdog draws from something intangible come from one's hope, beliefs, visions, life purpose, energy, and vitality. Leaders need to work on the development of their own spirit. And learn how to help others tap into theirs as well.

These areas of inter-personal and inner work are some starting points for individuals who want to assess their present leadership qualities, skills, and abilities. The next step is to structure opportunities to engage in self-development in these areas. Leaders know that learning is a life long journey and it is that very special quality that enhances their leadership more than anything else.

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