

CHAPTER 4

Leadership

“There are two ways of spreading light – to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it.”

Edith Wharton, 20th century American writer

For some people, leadership is a natural talent – it’s just a part of their personality. For others, leadership is a skill that is learned or emerges in emergency situations. If you are on a hike with a group of young teenagers, for example, and the adult leader becomes seriously ill, would you volunteer to take charge and go seek help? Would you naturally begin organizing the younger children with tasks and help keep them calm? Would you discuss and think of a plan to care for the group as well as the adult who is sick? Often, leaders emerge in a crisis.

There is also leadership by example. You can set the example of doing homework first in your family, picking up litter around your apartment building or volunteering for chores at school. This kind of leadership is inspirational to others through consistent activity that sets a high standard.

Some clubs and associations have an elected leadership where you might become the head of the chess club, soccer team, sewing club or student council. You are responsible to direct and guide the organization to accomplish its goals. If you are a leader, then others are following you. To lead means to go in front of others, to see beyond the present circumstances and to believe in your vision.

We probably have all experienced a really awful teacher, coach or club leader. The memories are almost always bitter. We need to think: what are the qualities of a good or great leader? How do you recognize someone who is worthy of your loyalty and support? Here are some qualities to look for in a leader:

Good leaders serve others. Among some great historical leaders, like Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa or Albert Schweitzer, are those who really served and cared for people, animals or the environment.

Good leaders inspire leadership in others. Those who follow good leaders feel themselves growing in heart and character, having a sense of nobility and honor about what they are doing. Good leaders share their power through believing, trusting and giving credit to those who support them. They give credit where credit is due instead of pulling attention always to themselves.

Good leaders communicate and plan well. Good leaders listen to the advice of others and are willing to examine suggestions — even those from the lowest ranks of the group. They are good planners and decision makers as well.

Good leaders learn and grow. Good leaders are always on the look out for better ways to do their jobs and improve themselves. They are aware of their shortcomings. They know that they must lead through example, not just through position and authority. They set a good example of honesty and trustworthiness. They apologize when necessary.

Good leaders take good care of themselves. Good leaders know how to balance serious work with play. They take time for reflection and planning. They know the value of investing in their relationships with friends and family.

Good leaders are also good followers. Even the most knowledgeable leader can learn from someone else. Wise leaders seek out mentors and the advice and example of others.

To lead, one must follow.

— Lao Tsu, ancient Chinese sage

The above points tell us that leadership ability is the product of one's character. Who a person is in a sense is more important than what he does. Internal character is more significant than external ability. There are plenty of people with all kinds of natural talent but who fritter it away because they did not have the self-discipline, humility or sense of teamwork to put it to good use. Best-selling author Steven Covey speaks of primary and secondary greatness. Too many people, encouraged by an ador-

ing world, focus on secondary greatness—the development of their external abilities—to the neglect of primary greatness—the development of their character, the result being that even their external abilities burn themselves out through misuse and they are left with nothing.

The vision factor

One of the key elements of leadership, and which perhaps

distinguishes a leader from a manager, is having a sense of vision. A manager must be a good organizer, takes care of his people and makes sure that the organization is operating efficiently to achieve its goals. But a manager is working within a certain framework that has already been determined. A leader, on the other hand, creates a new framework within which to operate based upon new goals. He sees things that no one else can see. He sees the possibilities of what could be but is not yet. Those future possibilities become as real to him as the present reality and he is a person who commits himself to fulfilling that dream without becoming bogged down in countless day-to-day distractions. He is a person who knows what he wants and is

ready to marshal all of his energy to achieve it. He is a Henry Ford, a Thomas Edison, a Martin Luther King—who through their vision and foresight transformed the world in which we live.

Possessing a vision is one thing, but being able to communicate it to others and inspire others with it is just as important to effective leadership. The vision must be transformed into an



If you can dream it, you can do it.

— Walt Disney

image that others can see and get excited about. A good leader is able to make others feel that his idea is their idea. He gives them a sense of ownership over the project, which motivates them and lends to them a sense of responsibility. There is a sense of working together for common purpose. The leader is the head; the others are various parts of the body—all different in function—but united in purpose.

Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence.

Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with great talent.

Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb.

Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts.

Persistence, determination alone are omnipotent.

—Ray Kroc
founder of McDonalds restaurants

Once the vision has been effectively communicated, it must be sustained. Leadership means being able to continually keep followers, whether they be employees, club members or students, motivated and focused on the goal. All too often projects are begun with great enthusiasm but over time peter out as people lose their focus and sense of purpose. Thus, an important element of good leadership is determination and constancy—keeping focused on the goal over sometimes a long period of time. This creates a sense of clarity and trust in the organization, paving the way to genuine accomplishment.

Obviously successful leaders must have confidence in their own ability to lead and in their ideas. It does not mean to be arrogant. Far from it. As we've said good leaders must have the humility to learn from others. But it means that, while being

aware of their shortcomings, leaders know their strengths as well. They do not worry about their inabilities, but are secure enough in themselves to surround themselves with subordinates who can make up for their leaders' deficiencies. Over time good leaders will work to develop and improve their abilities.

True leaders

Finally, we can say that to be a good leader you must be a 'people-oriented' person. You have to like people and like to be with others. Much of a leader's time is not his own. You must be available to others, sometimes late into the night; ready to answer questions, give guidance, exhort and encourage when necessary. Thus, a leader must be able and willing to give up his or her personal desires for the sake of the larger purpose. It means that he must have dominion over himself before he is qualified to have dominion over others. Otherwise, he will misuse his authority and end up exploiting others for his own gain.

Beyond this, you have to have sincere care and concern for those you are leading.

Some people 'lead' through fear and intimidation, through reward and punishment, but this is not leading. This is control and manipulation. In the long run people will rebel and leave. Exceptional leaders are those who project a parental concern for their followers, so much so that their hearts are moved to acts of great sacrifice and devotion. Thus, Mahatma Gandhi was referred to by his people as *bapu*, meaning 'father'. George Washington has been called the "father of his country". Among women, Mother Teresa's title is an expression of the motherly love she showered upon the poorest of the poor in Calcutta decade after decade. Such leaders are able to strike some chord deep inside of people through their personal example of commitment and sacrifice that arises from a parental heart.



Coping with failure

Ask any successful leader and he or she will tell you that the road to success is littered with many setbacks and failures. A good leader is not one who somehow has been able to avoid failure, but is one who learns from it and moves on. For many people the word 'failure' is a dreaded word that has a ring of finality to it—a signal to

give up, that one just doesn't have what it takes and never will. Their fear of failure, if they allow it to dominate their minds, becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy. They doom themselves to failure.

Successful leaders, on the other hand, are those who take an entirely different attitude. For them, failure is not the end of the world. Rather they see it as a temporary setback from which to learn and overcome. If mistakes were made, they need to be analyzed and corrected. Their vision remains intact. They keep their focus on the goal and continue to pour their energy into it. Thomas Edison is known to have commented that the discovery of the proper filament that would work in a light bulb was preceded by a thousand failures. Nelson Mandela

spent 28 years in a South African prison before he emerged to become its first black president. Abraham Lincoln suffered many electoral defeats on various levels before being elected the 16th president of the United States.

In every case it is the commitment to a higher vision that gives great leaders the strength to overcome adversity and allows them to finally attain success in their field. They are excited and energized by that vision, and in the process, they excite and energize others. They tend to see life as an adventure. All the ups and downs they experience as they proceed on their course are all a part of that adventurous life.



Questions for Discussion



The great English statesman, Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881), once said, "I must follow the people. Am I not their leader?" When is it a good idea for a political or social leader to follow the desires or dreams of his people? Describe another circumstance when it is not a good idea to do so? American politicians rely a lot on the results of opinion polls taken by professional pollsters. What are the risks and benefits of this practice in crafting a nation's policies and laws?

Individual Exercise



Research one of the following major historical leaders. How did this person change the society and world around them? What were the characteristics of his or her leadership style? Were the results of the person's leadership good or bad for his or her people, for the world?

Alexander the Great

Joan of Arc

Napoleon Bonaparte

Abraham Lincoln

Adolf Hitler

Nelson Mandela

For Your Journal



Your desire is to invent something that will improve the daily lives of ordinary people. What are some of the questions you will need to explore to achieve your goal? How does becoming a successful inventor make you a leader? What are the responsibilities of the creator of a new product? What are some consequences that he should think about before bringing his product to market?

See the Appendix for the psychological test pertaining to this lesson.