

Lesson Two: Leadership is Personal

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A. Key Learning Points

1. Leaders inspire and enable others to achieve things they would not have achieved on their own.
2. Caring, credibility, courage, and competence are essential qualities for an effective leader.
3. Indifference, inconsistency, and incompetence are qualities that cripple prospective leaders.
4. Leadership is personal. Toward this end, effective leaders:
 - understand individual people
 - attend to the little things
 - keep commitments
 - clarify expectations
 - demonstrate personal integrity
 - apologize sincerely when they make a mistake or impose on others unfairly
5. Leaders achieve great things when they recognize and celebrate little things.
6. Effective leaders seek and reward constructive conflict and creative failure.

B. Real World Examples and Considerations for Practitioners

1. Leaders inspire and enable others to achieve things they would not have achieved on their own.

The success of a leader ultimately is defined by the success of his/her followers. Although a leader may have great individual wisdom, intention, skill, and/or charisma, these are valuable leadership qualities only when they leverage and expand the capabilities of those with whom the leader lives and works.

We all know people who have extraordinary personal ability and leadership qualities, but lack interest, commitment, or skill actually leading others.

We also know people who, at first appearance, demonstrate little or no unusual ability or leadership qualities, but have extraordinary interest, commitment, and skill actually leading others.

The defining quality of an effective leader, therefore, is a sincere, personal interest in coaching and motivating the people with who and for whom they work. As such, effective leadership must be a personal, somewhat selfless, people-focused act.

2. Caring, credibility, courage, and competence are essential qualities for an effective leader.

It's said that people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.

A little bit of leadership caring goes a long way toward building employees' trust, respect, commitment, and willingness to work. Not surprisingly, when leaders do not truly care – it's understandable that their organizations become careless.

Mother Teresa, one of our greatest contemporary leaders, said “we can do no great things – only small things with great love.” In some cases, we've heard leaders dismiss the importance of caring about the little things, because they believed they were overwhelmed with more global leadership responsibilities.

Without underestimating the burden of leaders' global responsibilities, we agree with Mother Teresa that great things happen when and because we look after and appreciate the little things.

Caring is the cornerstone of credibility which is another non-negotiable quality required for effective leadership. When leaders lack credibility, they exhaust excessive energy and time repeatedly persuading employees to do what they're directed to do. Once leaders establish credibility, relatively little attention and energy is required to direct employees.

Courage is another requisite for effective leaders. Because leaders focus on making change, and followers tend to focus on preserving the status quo, the leader must have the courage to step first into the unknown while motivating others to follow.

President Kennedy's challenge to Americans to put a man on the moon by the end of the 1960's was a courageous act. Like his predecessor, President Eisenhower, Kennedy knew that the Apollo project was a long shot that would require considerable investment with a high probability of failure. Kennedy, however, believed this challenge was essential not only for national defense but to elevate and define American's national spirit. Kennedy, of course, believed courage was a defining personal and leadership quality, as discussed at length in his book *Profiles in Courage*.

On a smaller, more personal scale, every small business owner and entrepreneurial leader understands the importance of courage. Although there is no shortage of smart business concepts, fewer people have the courage to invest necessary time, money, and energy turning smart ideas into independent business realities. Those who own or work in a small business appreciate the need for courage especially when your next paycheck is not guaranteed.

Without leadership competence, caring, credibility, and courage are all inconsequential. Although every leader has a "honeymoon" period when their organization allows them considerable latitude and benefit of the doubt, sooner or later effective leaders must demonstrate technical competence running the organization successfully. Such competence is based on education, experience, and knowledge of the industry, strategic thinking and planning, networking, marketing and financial skills, appreciation and organization of operational complexity, managerial support for successful current operations, and attention to human resources as an invaluable business asset.

3. Indifference, inconsistency, and incompetence are qualities that cripple prospective leaders.

These qualities are the inverse of those described in (2) above. When leaders are indifferent, employees and customers will become indifferent. When leaders are inconsistent, employees and customers will become confused and ultimately frustrated. When leaders are incompetent, employees and customers will become unresponsive and ultimately hostile.

4. Leadership is personal. Toward this end, effective leaders:

- understand individual people
- attend to the little things
- keep commitments
- clarify expectations
- demonstrate personal integrity
- apologize sincerely when they make a mistake or impose on others unfairly

As discussed previously, it is not unusual for leaders to underestimate the importance of small but significant personal actions in their rush to achieve great and global organizational successes. In his book, *7 Habits*, Stephen Covey discusses the importance of the above leadership behaviors. He suggests that leaders who consistently attend to these things build credibility, confidence, and loyalty among those with whom they work. These accumulating assets are important for leaders, especially at times when they must make difficult and unpopular decisions and when they make mistakes (as every successful leaders inevitably does).

5. Leaders achieve great things when they recognize and celebrate little things.

If you do not look after the little local, things (and the newest and least-paid employees), you will not likely have much chance to look after the great, global things. Consistent, frequent, personal praise and recognition develops pride, confidence, productivity, satisfaction, and self-direction.

When world class athletes score a goal, they celebrate. In fact, they do things in public to express their joy and satisfaction that would be considered absurd in any other arena or forum.

In too many businesses each and every day, employees succeed without celebration or recognition at significant tasks and projects. Busy as they are and pressed by management to be more productive, they typically press stoically on to their next assignment.

While annual celebrations are important, more frequent, local, and personal celebrations are better.

6. Effective leaders seek and reward constructive conflict and creative failure.

There is a well-known, true story about a promising IBM middle manager who failed miserably leading his first multi-million dollar project. When CEO Tom Watson called this manager to arrange a meeting, the manager fully expected (and believed he deserved) to be fired. When the manager offered his resignation, Watson laughed. "Are you kidding?" he said, "we've just invested 2 million in your executive education. Tell me what have you learned?"

Leaders know that leadership is risky business. As such, they expect to fail. Effective leaders learn from these failures and minimize potential risks associated with future recurring problems and failures. In addition to learning from failures, effective leaders prefer failing fast rather than prolonging duration of failure. Because quicker failure is less expensive and less painful than prolonged failure, effective leaders encourage prompt, direct, honest communication about business deficiencies. One CEO we worked with summed this up well with the expression – "Fail Forward, Faster." This leader expects managers to learn from their failures (fail forward) and do so quickly (faster) to maximize learnings and minimize potential liabilities.

Similarly, while many leaders prefer to surround themselves with people who agree with and reinforce their beliefs and decisions, effective leaders encourage honest, direct, constructive disagreement. Effective leaders know that conflict (as long as it is constructive) is one expression of people caring about the company. They also believe that conflict (when constructive) is a source of creativity and positive change.

C. Recommended Reading Assignment & Highlights – All selections are from Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Successful People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change*. (Fireside)

Habit 1: Be Proactive, Habit 2: Begin With The End In Mind

Until we take how we see ourselves (and how we see other) into account, we will be unable to understand how others see and feel about themselves and their world. Unaware, we will project our intentions on their behavior and call ourselves objective.

It is not what happens to us, but our response to what happens to us that hurts us.

The difference between people who exercise initiative and those who don't is literally the difference between night and day. I'm not talking about 25 to 50 percent difference in effectiveness; I'm talking about a 5,000 plus percent difference, particularly if they are smart, aware, and sensitive to others. "Begin with the end in mind" is based on the principle that all things are created twice. There's a mental or first creation, and a physical or second creation to all things.

Personal leadership is not a singular experience. It doesn't begin and end with the writing of a personal mission statement. It is, rather, the ongoing process of keeping your vision and values before you and aligning your life to be congruent with those most important things.

D. Additional Resources and Links to Others Sources

Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus, *Leaders: Strategies for Taking Charge*. (HarperBusiness)

James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *Credibility: How Leaders Gain and Lose It, Why People Demand It*. (Jossey-Bass)

John C. Maxwell, *Developing the Leader Within You*. (Nelson)

Tom Morris, *If Aristotle Ran General Motors*. (Owl Books, Henry Holt)

E. Question(s) for Reflection and Discussion

1. How is your organization and/or community different because of your leadership? Be specific - tell us how you're making that leadership "difference."