

A COMPOSITE OF THE SUCCESSFUL LEADER OF THE 21ST CENTURY THE FIVE FACTORS

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ABSTRACT

Much has been discussed about what an excellent leader should look like in the 21st century. Many concepts have been discussed including leading change, transformational leadership, ethics, emotional intelligence, and much more. Many authors such as John Kotter, Gary Hamel, and Robert Kaplan have written about ways to achieve high energy and smart leadership that provides for rapid business transformation in difficult economic times. In the following article the five factors of empowered leadership will be discussed to provide stakeholders the everyday engagement to bring the organization closer to the mission and vision.

KEYWORDS: Transformational Leadership, Disengaged

INTRODUCTION

The Five Factors

Kotter (1996), in his groundbreaking book *Leading Change*, states that many employees who have been through painful change efforts that have not succeeded end up angry, disengaged, and suspicious. That being said, how do leaders produce change efforts that are successful, productive, and ongoing? This has been the age old question since the time of Fredrick Taylor. The amount of change and needed transformation among organizations is not going to slow anytime soon in these troubling economic times (Kotter, 2009). Great leaders fail because they do not have a roadmap to achieve desired results and then do not stay on a steadfast path. There are five important factors to consider when leading any group of individuals in any environment. First, always tell the truth; second, be ethical in all your dealings; third, treat everyone with respect and appreciation; fourth, be humble; and fifth, include everyone.

Always Tell the Truth

Always tell the truth, because employees are going to find out the truth later anyway. Once stakeholders know that the manager lied, all trust is lost. This will have a direct impact on the mission and vision of the company. If the workforce knows management is untruthful then staff will not follow the leaders in place, and this has a direct effect on retention and turnover. At that point you may have to start all over again, wasting valuable time, money, and resources. The fundamental principle of not telling the truth is at the heart of why organizations fail, why good employees leave, why morale and engagement is low, and why leaders get stuck in mediocrity (Timmons, 2005). Let me define what a liar is: if a manager withholds performance feedback, unspoken praise, withholds information or best practices, simply it is a lie. If one can grasp this concept, it will greatly affect the people being supervised.

When a manager withholds or twists the truth, staff will not share the feelings, ideas, or dreams that drive performance. If this happens, then employees run at about 50 to 75 percent of what can really be done, and no one wants this. Trust evaporates and productivity goes down markedly. Let employees rise above the politics, alienation, and fear of reprisal to speak the truth; this starts with the leader (Timmons, 2005). Telling the truth is about having integrity.

It is not about rationalizing or putting a slant on a given event or circumstance. It is about facing up to the truth, good or bad, and communicating it to your workforce. Good leaders have the courage and fortitude to “tell it like it is” and then have the bravery to get everyone on the right track in the most positive way (Stefano, 2010). Integrity builds trust, trust builds employee engagement, and engagement fuels the fires of productivity.

Be Ethical in all Dealings

Ethics is at the core of all dealings regarding any leader. Values and morals play a pivotal role in the day-to-day environment of any organization. When one compromises ethics, it brings a tidal wave of doubt, suspicion, and copycat behavior that endangers the overall mission of the company. In the 21st century the business world has seen implosions that have devastated companies as well as individuals. Compromising ethics simply is not worth it and leaves employees feeling hopeless and battered for months or even years to come. Doing the “right thing” is not always easy, but in the long run pays off tenfold. Leaders must stop thinking in the “short term” and rather think in the “long term” and about what effect the right or wrong decisions will have on employees, management, customers, and society as a whole (Thompson, Thach, & Morelli, 2011). The following will outline how to be ethical in all dealings.

First, state the question or dilemma clearly. As a leader do not get lost in the mist of vagueness, professional jargon, or ambiguity. Is the scope of the ethical situation questionable in regards to perspective or assumptions? Do not rush to “solve the problem”; this can cause the leader to miss critical issues that may cause core values to be compromised (Pope & Vasquez, 2011).

Second, anticipate who will be affected by the decision and the possible negative outcomes. Many times in an effort to maximize profits, leaders forego anticipating who will be hurt by whatever unethical actions that are being considered. This can have tragic consequences for the leader, the employee, and the organization.

Third, assess whether your areas of expertise, experience, and skills are a good match for dealing with the situation. Many times leaders do not have the experience needed to handle ethical situations. One must be humble enough to call in needed assistance from people who have dealt with like situations before (Pope & Vasquez, 2011).

Fourth, consider whether self-interest, biases, or strong feelings might cloud your ethical judgment. Wanting to please superiors, the desire to avoid conflict or the fact that taking the higher road may get one into trouble will cause leaders to suspend ethical beliefs. Furthermore, pressures of money, peers, referrals, prestige, or promotion can cause good people to do the wrong thing. Stand tall and be forthright and always follow the ethical path.

Fifth, try to adopt the perspective of each individual that could be affected. Putting yourself in the shoes of those who will be affected can change your point of view and lead to a greater understanding of the situation.

Sixth, decide what to do and take action in a way that is value based. Once a decision is made, rethink it and call for consultation of other ethical decision makers. Rethinking gives leaders one last chance to evaluate that they are following the steadfast path (Pope & Vasquez, 2011).

Seventh, Assume personal responsibility for all consequences this ensures that all parties know that one is facing true north. This also facilitates an atmosphere of honesty and trust among all parties involved.

Treat Everyone with Respect and Appreciation

According to Gostick & Elton (2009), 79% of employees surveyed who quit their jobs cite a lack of appreciation as the key reason for leaving. In North America 65% reported that they weren't recognized in the least bit the previous year

in any way, shape, or form. This is death for any organization. Research after research report states that for employees to be engaged and feel empowered, they must have a sense that they are being respected and appreciated for what they do on a day-to-day basis (Gostick & Elton, 2009). Simply said, when workers know that their strengths and potential will be praised and recognized, they are more likely to produce specified results. An effective leader must have the ability to recognize employees' talents and contributions in a purposeful manner. This is essential. It is not enough to recognize these attributes at an annual evaluation, one must be constantly and consistently recognizing desired behaviors in a timely manner. The result can be dramatic: lower turnover results, achievement of enhanced business results, stronger goal setting, communication, trust, and accountability.

When management respects and appreciates their workers they gain a group of individuals that Gostick & Elton (2009) describe as a "Self Actualized Workforce." To achieve this companies must provide an equitable salary and benefits, a positive work experience, and most of all recognition. What is accomplished here is engagement and commitment of individuals, increased performance, self-actualization, and mutually beneficial success.

So how do leaders do this? The number one thing a leader can do is establish trust. Trust is the key, and if your staff does not trust you, they are not going to go the extra mile to make the organization successful. To foster trust there are some simple rules: do not lie; if you say you are going to do something, do it. Give your people the benefit of the doubt and back them up; admit when you are wrong; do not be arrogant; know your business, and be strong but amiable. The second part of this is never losing your cool. The earmark of a good leader is the ability to stay cool and focused when everything and everyone is going wrong, and then to get it all back on track. Thirdly, create day-to-day recognition and make it frequent, specific, and timely; give above and beyond recognition; ie, recognize significant achievements, ideas, and going beyond the goal. Remember that career recognition builds trust and establishes a greater sense of connection with all employees. Plan celebration events, "we are all in this together." Finally, say "thank you" (Gostick & Elton, 2009).

Be Humble

No one likes an arrogant leader. Being arrogant just doesn't work. Do not confuse arrogance with confidence, one works the other doesn't. Excellent leaders periodically conduct an honest evaluation of themselves. Being honest with yourself is critical; if you are, your enemies will not be able to have power over you. Always accept yourself as you are, but strive to be a better person everyday. Understand your limitations; no matter how talented you are, you will have limitations and there will be individuals that can do certain tasks better than you. Look to those persons who do the tasks better than you and consider it as potential improvement. Employees will appreciate your honesty and will partner with you in achieving the mission and vision of the organization. Recognizing your limitations does not mean abandoning your dreams, and it does not mean giving up on learning new things or improving your existing abilities (Pope & Vasquez, 2011).

Recognizing your own faults is vital in understanding yourself. People tend to judge others because it is a lot easier than looking at oneself; unfortunately this is unproductive and at times harmful. Perhaps even worse it keeps people from forming relationships and improving themselves. As a practical exercise, catch yourself judging others and instead judge yourself.

Appreciating the talent of others is not only a good habit of top leaders but leads to your success as well. Challenge yourself to look at others and appreciate the things they can do and, more generally, to appreciate others for who they are. Train yourself to separate your opinions from your fears and you will appreciate others more, it will make you more humble (Maxwell, 2011).

Do not ever be afraid to make mistakes. If a person has never made a mistake, then they have never learned anything either. Mistakes are part of being human and everyone will make them. Any one person can know only the smallest bits of information of the tremendous knowledge that has been amassed over the past. Furthermore, each person experiences only a sliver of the present and knows little of the future. One essential ability of excellent leaders is the ability to defer to others' judgment even if they do not agree with them (Maxwell, 2011). Always take action on the facts and put biases aside.

Helping others is key to becoming outstanding leaders; outstanding leaders are servant leaders. Treat others as equals and help them because it is the right thing to do. It has been said that when you help others you help yourself. As staff and even people outside the organization see you helping others, you will truly gain supporters and allies. Practice gentleness in everyday actions, absorb the venom from other's attacks and react with gentleness and respect (Maxwell, 2011). Finally appreciate your talents, this does not mean being prideful, pride stems from insecurity about oneself. Self-esteem stems from being comfortable in your skin and knowing what you can do well and what you need help with. Think about the skills you have and be thankful for them.

Include Everyone

One thing that poor leaders do is leave employees out; they do not bring them into the circle. This can have tragic consequences both to the organization and to one's career. No one wants to be the "odd man out" everyone wants to belong for it is human nature. The first step is to build trust. Trust is the most important ingredient for all relationships, so building trust is the first thing you have to do so everyone feels included. Think about any relationship you ever had, once you lost trust in the person, product, service, or organization the bond was basically over. Trust is about doing what you say you are going to do and being who you say you are. It is a philosophy that must be demonstrated in everything you do day in and day out (Maxwell, 2011). Trust is showing your staff that what you do is reliable, responsible and accountable and that they can rely on you for consistency. Also, it lets them know that is what you expect from them. When your words and actions are congruent, you will foster trust. Therefore, be very conscious of your words and behaviors and insure that they are worthy of your employees' trust.

The second part is to communicate positively and openly. Every employee needs to feel valued and appreciated. This is best done by listening to each person and honoring each one for what they have to say. Meet with your staff and go over values, mission, and vision of the organization and how that fits their own personal values and vision. Have them share their ideas, take time to share your own vision and values and find a way to intertwine them all together. This will make the employee feel valued and included.

Always expect the best from your staff. This is the concept called "The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy" which says that people generally will perform in the way others expect them to perform. So if you have high expectations of your staff and treat them as if they are capable, competent people, then they will be (Maxwell, 2011).

Appreciate everyone, no matter what position they are in. Whenever you catch people doing the right thing, let them know and tell others about it. Give everyone recognition and appreciation at every opportunity and make sure it is timely. Most people have an innate need to feel appreciated and needed for that matter. If you can foster an atmosphere of appreciation, others will flock to your side (Kotter, 2003).

Creating a positive atmosphere at work is essential. Research after research states that if you create a positive environment workers produce more (Gostick & Elton, 2009). Thinking that they can get more from people when they dread coming to work is the mark of a very poor leader. Why would anyone believe that a negative experience is going to

make people happy and produce more? It is quite the contrary (Kotter, 2003). Creating an atmosphere that fosters the attitude that “we are glad you’re here” can produce great benefits for the employee as well as the organization. The Staff will feel free to grow, ask questions, and voice concerns without the fear of reprisal and will feel that the leader is very approachable. Leaders need to smile, act friendly, call people by name, and make eye contact with everyone they come in contact with. In turn employees will feel respected, appreciated, and that you care about their well being.

CONCLUSIONS

To sustain a creative culture, servant leaders must practice these five factors every single day: always tell the truth, be ethical your dealings, treat everyone with respect and appreciation, be humble, and include everyone. They must make this practice their single priority in leading people in the 21st century. They must consistently think about the emotional intelligence of their organization as well as the staff they lead. They must be seen, they must listen, they must guide, they must teach, and they must serve. If a leader can accomplish these five factors then success is the sixth factor.

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