

What Does Leadership Mean Today?

From Management to Leadership

Over the past 20 years there has been a dramatic shift in organisations from management to leadership. This has changed the focus from the manager's ability to direct and control the workforce, to the leader's ability to empower and influence. Getting the best out of people is no longer a matter of getting them to simply do what they are required to do. Today it is about getting them to do more than simply meet their job description. It is about getting them to do the required job and more. Today the real value that leaders bring is their ability to get workers not only to come to work, but to come with a positive attitude, to come with a collaborative spirit and to come with the energy and enthusiasm needed to drive high performance. This is what is called discretionary effort. It is hard to measure and hard to command. It is what workers volunteer because they enjoy what they do and want to contribute to their teams and to the organisation's success.

Two hundred years ago the industrial revolution entrenched the concept of management and supervision in our organisations. Senior managers and owners sought to control workers through supervision of their work and through the introduction of standardized practices and procedures. This produced great stability but it came at a cost. The cost was rigidity and inflexibility and, by our standards today, considerable under-performance. People were paid for attendance, for the hours worked, rather than for what they did, their performance. Today having good management is a business necessity, it is leadership which provides the business advantage.

The traditional workplace was a place of low expectations. The workers didn't have high expectations of their bosses. Being treated with respect, being challenged and making a difference through your work are relatively new concepts. Customers also were generally not surprised if a product or service didn't live up to expectations. Investors were also content with meager returns. This produced a level of complacency in organizations especially those in government protected industries or in monopoly situations.

How this has changed. Today expectations have soared. Customers demand service, employees demand development, investors demand returns and the community demands responsibility. Today it's not just having a team that counts, but having a high performance team. Standards have risen and competition has dramatically increased. Only the great teams can have sustained success. The good might survive in the short term but you need to be exceptional to experience long term success.

This has created an incredible leadership challenge. Whilst management was once sufficient, leadership is now essential. Today management gets you in the game, but it is leadership that determines how far you get.

Leadership is in demand at all level in organisations and there are concerns expressed globally, about whether today's leaders have the capability required to meet future challenges. The concern is whether the current crop of leaders can share vision and set direction and whether they have the ability to get the best out of people and to take people with them. Today all teams have a salary cap. You can't just put more people on the field, you have to get more out of the people you have. This is true in sport and the business world equally. The ultimate hidden value is the so far unrealized potential of the people throughout the organization.

Leadership Capabilities

So what is leadership? Leaders do seven things distinctly well:-

1. Vision

They create the vision and a sense of purpose which they widely share. They articulate a compelling picture of the future and this provides people with focus and the clarity they need. They also link people to the vision by showing them how what they do in their work directly relates to the vision. In this way they show their people how what they do is significant in achieving the vision and in contributing to the ultimate success of the organization.

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2. Empowerment

They empower people to get the job done, but they hold them accountable for results in return. They ensure that people have the skills and capabilities required to be successful and then give them the support they need to perform. This gives people the scope to do things their way, and to take significant ownerships of what they do.

3. Inspiration

They inspire and energise people through their passion and their enthusiasm. They show their people how they can make a real difference to their customers and to the communities that they serve. Passion and enthusiasm are infectious and can quickly spread throughout the organisation. The mood of the team is a powerful motivating force. Managing that mood is a daily leadership challenge.

4. Challenge

They embrace change and constantly look for a better way to do things. They challenge the status quo, value learning and seek innovation in products, processes and services.

5. Collaboration

They build a culture of transparency where collaboration and knowledge sharing are important elements. They understand the true value of teamwork and they bring people together to work effectively in teams.

6. Recognition

They celebrate success and they understand the powerful impact of appreciation and recognition. They create an environment where people are given the feedback required to enable them to deliver superior performance.

7. Modelling

They “walk the talk” in a very genuine way and set a standard of behaviour built on clearly articulated values. These values are brought to life through their own personal behaviour. It is their daily discipline to behave in accordance with their values which has such impact in building the desired culture.

Leadership Challenge

It is the character of the leader – the “who” as well as the “what” – that has such a powerful impact on others. Leaders have a special responsibility. They are not only responsible to get the job done, but also to develop people. In a very personal sense they have powerful impact on the people they lead. Leaders can either keep people where they are or they can develop them, motivate them, empower them and lead them to the future.

Leaders express more through what they do than what they say. The most powerful leadership message is the behaviour of the leader. Leaders are always on display and people look to them for the example of what is expected. Leaders must fully understand the values they stand for. Whether it is respect, integrity, teamwork, or achievement they must appreciate that these values must be on display all of the time – on the job as well as off the job. How they behave matters greatly and leaders need to work together and be accountable for the example they set.

Leaders have a major role in giving people hope and building belief in the future. As Napoleon said, “leaders are purveyors of hope.” In times of change people need a sense of optimism about the future as well as the ability to learn and change. Cynicism is the greatest enemy of learning – it has a toxic affect on organizational culture because it takes energy from any initiative. Skepticism is a healthy response to change as it just means “I’m not sure yet”. When cynicism infects the leadership, a company is doomed and the people are badly served. In the complex times we live in, and with the challenges that we face we need the best leadership possible.

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Personal Leadership

The starting point is personal leadership. Taking responsibility for what you do and what you promise. Leadership is about taking the initiative and accepting personal responsibility to make a real difference – a real difference to the lives of the people that are led and the communities that are served.

In a very personal way leaders make this difference by:-

1. showing a genuine interest in others
2. seeing the potential in them
3. creating the opportunities for them
4. challenging them to be their best
5. providing the support and coaching they need
6. giving them feedback, appreciation and recognition

Leadership is not waiting for someone else to lead. Any good manager can keep you where you are today. However, you can't be a leader if you are not taking people somewhere, if you do not have a vision for the future.

Michael Chaney, one of Australia's most respected corporate leaders, makes it clear that leadership is the greatest challenge facing companies today. He believes that the recipe for the success achieved by Wesfarmers was their ability to build leaders who did two critical things: sustained a disciplined focus on performance and at the same time maintained uncompromising integrity. Looking to the future it was his view that the greatest impediment to continued success will be the ability to produce enough of these leaders, fast enough to meet the demands of growth.

Never before have we expected so much of our leaders – leaders at all levels – and never before has the gap been so great between what we need and what we believe we have. The race to close that gap is underway globally. There is significant investing of funds, time and energy in leadership development. The opportunities are great, but so too are the risks of not succeeding. Never has there been a better time to show leadership, a better time to aspire to be a leader.

Personal leadership

Live the vision (aspiration)

Are you clear about the difference you have come to make?

Engage people (inspire)

Do you create a belief in people of the importance of what they do?...

Act with integrity (values)

Do you have the discipline to walk the talk on a daily basis?

Deploy your strengths (self knowledge)

Do you know your strengths and weaknesses and the impact they have?

Enjoy your work (fulfillment)

Do you have a passion for what you do?

Recognise others (feedback)

Do you give others the recognition, respect and appreciate they require?



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Self awareness

Leadership starts with self awareness and a good place to begin is with a thoughtful leadership self assessment. Leaders should reflect upon their strengths and weaknesses and most importantly upon the impact that they have on others. A good way to validate this reflection is by asking for feedback from others. Finally a leader should consider the type of leader that he/she is trying to be.

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Leadership style

Step one: **Leadership philosophy**

1. What do I stand for as a leader?

2. How do I want to add value as a leader?

Step two: **Profile success**

What do the best leaders here excel at?

Step three: **Skill set**

What is my strengths profile?

Step four: **Personal Goals**

What do I want to achieve as a leader in this organization?

Step five: **Action priorities**

What are my key areas for development?

Step six: **Performance goals**

What will be my focus (eg. What will I do more of/less of)?

Step seven: **Development plan**

What support will I need to achieve my goals?