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Leadership

What is leadership?

Leadership is the ability of an individual or a group of people to influence and guide followers or members of an organization, society or team. Leadership often is an attribute tied to a person's title, seniority or ranking in a hierarchy. However, it's an attribute anyone can have or attain, even those without leadership positions. It's a developable skill that can be improved over time.

Leaders are found and required in most aspects of society, including business, politics, religion and social- and community-based organizations. Leaders are seen as people who make sound and sometimes difficult decisions. They articulate a clear vision, establish achievable goals and provide followers with the knowledge and tools necessary to achieve those goals.

An effective leader has the following characteristics: self-confidence, strong communication and management skills, creative and innovative thinking, perseverance, willingness to take risks, open to change, levelheaded and reactivity in times of crisis.

Why is leadership important?

Leadership plays a central role in the success and direction of a business. Organizations depend on successful leaders to communicate its mission, vision and goals, unite team members around those goals and then achieve them. These capabilities are especially important in times of crisis.

Hard decision-making is often required for the success and evolution of a business. Businesses often depend on leaders with high competencies and emotional intelligence to make tough decisions and solve problems. This level of trust and success often leads to positive, productive work environments that encourage teamwork, employee well-being and strong work cultures that are attractive to top talent.

Strong leadership is critical to an organization's competitiveness because it drives change and innovation. The best leaders keep an eye on changing directions in their industry, promote new ideas from within their company and bring in innovative thinkers.

Leadership theory

How people become leaders and what makes a great leader have been the subject of study for centuries. The 19th century was dominated by the Great Man Theory, which stressed that leadership is a unique, natural skill and that great leaders are born to the task.

The following are some of the many leadership theories advanced in the 20th century:

1. **Trait theory:** dates to the mid-20th century and it centers on the idea that some people are born with certain personality traits that make them great leaders, such as integrity and self-confidence.
2. **Situational leadership:** is where the leadership style is adjusted based on the readiness or skill-level of followers in a given situation.
3. **Contingency theory:** posits that effective leadership depends on having the right leader for the right situation.
4. **Transactional leadership:** is an approach where leaders reward or punish followers to achieve results.
5. **Transformational leadership:** is where leaders appeal to followers' values and emotions to transform the way they think and approach their work or life.
6. **Behaviorist theory:** encompasses a person's leadership skills are developed and trained as products of their environment.
7. **Behavioral theory:** is where a leader models certain behaviors, setting a good example for others to follow.
8. **Functional theory:** is leadership based on a collection of people's behaviors and group dynamics, not individuals.

9. **Path goal theory:** is where leaders set goals and smooth the path to those goals to motivate and drive performance.

Leadership Styles

Leadership style is the manner and approach of providing direction, implementing plans, and motivating people. Kurt Lewin (1939) led a group of researchers to identify different styles of leadership. This early study has been very influential and established three major leadership styles. The three major styles of leadership are:

- Authoritarian or autocratic .
- Participative or democratic.
- Delegative or Free Reign

Although good leaders use all three styles, with one of them normally dominant, bad leaders tend to stick with one style.

1. **Authoritarian or autocratic:** This style is used when leaders tell their employees what they want done and how they want it accomplished, without getting the advice of their followers. Some of the appropriate conditions to use it are when one has all the information to solve the problem, one is short on time, and ones employees are well motivated.

Some people tend to think of this style as a vehicle for yelling, using demeaning language, and leading by threats and abusing their power. This is not the authoritarian style, rather it is an abusive, unprofessional style called bossing people around. It has no place in a leader's repertoire.

The authoritarian style should normally only be used on rare occasions. If one have the time and want to gain more commitment and motivation from other employees, then one should use the participative style.

2. **Participative or democratic:** This style involves the leader including one or more employees in the decision making process (determining what to do and how to do it). However, the leader maintains the final decision making authority. Using this style is not a sign of weakness; rather it is a sign of strength that your employees will respect.

This is normally used when one has part of the information, and ones employees have other parts. Note that a leader is not expected to know everything -- this is why one employs k n o w l e d g e a b l e and s k i l l f u l employees. Using this style is of mutual benefit -- it allows them to become part of the team and allows one to make better decisions.

3. **Delegative or Free Reign:** In this style, the leader allows the employees to make the decisions. However, the leader is still responsible for the decisions that are made. This is used when employees are able to

analyze the situation and determine what needs to be done and how to do it. One cannot do everything! One must set priorities and delegate certain tasks.

This is not a style to use so that one can blame others when things go wrong, rather this is a style to be used when one fully trust and confidence in the people below one. Do not be afraid to use it, however, use it wisely!

How to become a better leader

The workplace has changed dramatically over the last few years, with the increase of remote work and the growing importance placed on employee touchpoints, such as diversity, equity and inclusion. There are several leadership qualities that can be refined to help individuals become better leaders:

- 1. Become more self-aware:** Great leaders know their strengths, weaknesses and effects on the people they lead. They set a good example and model good behavior. One way to become more self-aware is to seek feedback from those people.
- 2. Refine communication skills:** Leaders should be effective and clear in their communication; they must also be good listeners. Communication should be based in openness, honesty and transparency. This involves setting clear goals and expectations and giving regular feedback to employees.
- 3. Connect with team members:** Connections build trust, understanding and bonds that are critical for successful leadership. The best leaders should get to know the personalities and capabilities of their team members.
- 4. Encourage growth:** The best leaders encourage their own, their colleagues' and their employees' or followers' personal and professional growth. Encouraging growth strengthens bonds and trust between leaders and team members, and increases what teams can accomplish.
- 5. Be open to change:** Change is inevitable in business; being open to it and encouraging new ideas and perspectives from team members can help leaders become more effective.
- 6. Develop positive attitudes:** Responding to negative situations and problems with positive approaches and encouragement is a great way to model and improve problem-solving skills.
- 7. Seek out growth opportunities:** Great leaders look for opportunities for continuous improvement and education. This can involve attending conferences, finding a mentor and reading books on leadership.