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Leading People to Make Extraordinary Things Happen

Looking around the world, past and present, we see individuals in our personal and business lives that stand out in their ability to enlist the aid and support of others to get things done. What is it about these individuals that inspire others to extraordinary things, to take risks, to do things they didn't think possible, give whole hearted allegiance and walk through hell and high water for a difficult cause?

Mel Zeigler says, "A leader discovers the hidden chasm between where things are and where things would be better, and strings up a makeshift bridge to attempt the crossing. From the other side, they guide those who dare to cross this rickety traverse until the engineers can build a sturdier span for all."

In the sections that follow, we explore multiple aspects of leadership and give ideas to help you lead people in your life and organization to accomplish great things.

Leader Behaviors and Traits

What sets leaders apart from others is what they do and how it impacts those around them. Leaders show by example how to get things done, inspiring others to get on board and be in the game. The following traits and behaviors characterize effective leaders:

- **Feedback** – Gives praise and criticism when needed in a manner that does not cause defensiveness or leave someone feeling attacked.
- **Problem Solver** – Focuses on creative problem solving, not placing blame or attacking people. Adapts to change and often ambiguous circumstances. Thinks strategically, making good decisions under pressure. Overcomes obstacles.
- **Involvement** – Involves others in things that impact them, encouraging dialog, ideas and participation.
- **Integrity**– Honest. Does what he/she says and acts in ways consistent with their values and principles.
- **Visionary** – Has a clear purpose and direction for self and team, creating a picture and vision others believe in. Always looking for ideas that move the organization to reach the company's vision, purpose, and established strategy.
- **Courageous** – Demonstrates the courage to do what is right, despite personal risk or discomfort. Takes a stand for important issues. Willingly speaks out expressing ideas and opinions, even when unpopular. Challenges others to make tough choices. Holds firm to position when necessary.
- **Risk-Taker** – Takes necessary risks to do things different. Encourages other to take appropriate risk. Willing to challenge the way it has always been done. Does not follow the same path, trying new ways of doing things. Understands and appreciates mistakes and creates opportunities for growth.
- **Persevere**– Strong, positive attitude in self and team. Knows success will happen. Puts forth extra effort to make things happen and achieve results.
- **Coach** – Uses coaching approach that allows employees to discern and solve their own problems, rather than directing them to the solution. Accurately identifies and communicates strengths and developmental needs in others.
- **Delegates** – Assigns projects and responsibilities, without detailing exact steps on how to get there. Delegates to match interest and ability. Allows others to own delegated projects and holds them accountable.
- **Motivating**– Generates excitement and enthusiasm. Inspires to excel. Creates positive, upbeat environment. Wins support from others. Creates work situations and an environment that motivates teams to be effective and efficient. Creates an environment that brings out the best and inspires individuals in the group to do the same. Motivates and excites individuals to do what is required for the benefit of all. Does not carry others to the end result, but sets the surrounding for developing qualities in them so they carry each other.
- **Performance** – Obtains commitment, clarifies expectations, requires results and follows through on performance plans.
- **Team Building**– Influential in directing others towards the best outcome for the group, developing a cohesive and cooperative work group. Builds trust and cooperation in others by trusting them, resolving conflicts, encouraging open communication, conveying confidence and hope by words and actions.
- **Passionate** – Is passionate and enthusiastic in conveying ideas and persuading others to get on board. Possesses energy that ignites others. Gets ideas heard and accepted. Shares real feelings and heart.

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- **Self-Confident** – Projects confidence and energy in body language, voice tone, and words used, to communicate with others. Realistic confidence in his or her own judgment, ability, and power. Believes he or she has the power to make a difference and accepts the responsibility of doing it.
- **Selfless** – Shares in, and celebrates, the success of the team without looking for personal credit or recognition. Focused on logical results for the overall good, not selfish desires or need for control. Acts for the greater good.
- **Collaborative** – Seeks input and perspectives from others, through individual and group discussions. Gives teams and individuals a voice and input in decisions.
- **Situational** – Ability to adjust leadership style depending on the circumstances. More authoritative during crisis situations. Democratic in situations warranting consensus building.
- **Supportive**– Shows concern for employees and others providing tools, resources, and support to help get things done.
- **Decisive**– Ability to gather facts and make quick, quality decisions with confidence.
- **Accountable** – Accepts responsibility for own actions and results of the team. Holds self and others accountable, never wavering or justifying subpar results.
- **Listens** – Listens to others giving them full attention. Asks questions to understand and obtains all relevant facts. Open to suggestions and feedback from employees and others.
- **Straight-Talker** – Open, direct and persuasive with communication and interpersonal skills. No surprises.
- **Respectful** – Respects others, builds people up, accepts differences, and values diversity. Never "back bites" or downgrades others.
- **Initiative**– Takes initiative to act on opportunities, sets things up, volunteers, takes action, and gets things done.

Management vs. Leadership
According to Warren Bennis and Dan Goldsmith, "A good manager does things right. A leader does the right things."

An effective manager should possess leadership skills and an effective leader should demonstrate management skills. Leadership involves power by influence, while management involves power by position.

Paul Birch drew 12 distinctions between leaders and managers:
- Managers administer; leaders innovate.
- Managers ask how and when; leaders ask what and why.
- Managers focus on systems; leaders focus on people.
- Managers do things right; leaders do the right things.
- Managers maintain; leaders develop.
- Managers rely on control; leaders inspire trust.
- Managers have short-term perspective; leaders have long-term perspective.

- Managers accept the status quo; leaders challenge the status quo.
- Managers have an eye on the bottom line; leaders have an eye on the horizon.
- Managers imitate; leaders originate.
- Managers emulate the classic good soldier; leaders are their own person.
- Managers copy; leaders show originality.

Roadblocks to Leadership
The following are some of the areas in our lives that prevent us from being effective leaders: Wanting to be liked, having to be perfect, fear of embarrassment, focusing on problems, low self-esteem, being too critical, being too controlling, fear of taking risks, trying to save everyone, fear of rejection, being close minded, lacking in purpose and unwillingness to work hard.

Acknowledging roadblocks is the first step to moving past them. Identify specific benefits to you, your company and those in your circle of influence, when you overcome your roadblocks to leadership. Set specific goals and actions that help eliminate your road blocks to leadership.

Perhaps Ralph Waldo Emerson brings it all together for us in his definition of success, "To laugh often and love much; to win the respect of intelligent persons and the affection of children; to earn the approbation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends; to appreciate beauty; to find the best in others; to give of one's self; to leave the world a bit better, where by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition; to have played and laughed with enthusiasm and sung with exultation; to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived – this is to have succeeded!"

Leadership does not only manifest itself as purely a business phenomenon. We can all think of inspiring leaders we've encountered: a politician, an officer in the armed forces, a scout or guide leader, a teacher, a parent, etc. Companies, government, schools, communities, and homes need real leaders to stand up for the right things, to take responsibility, and inspire others to do extraordinary things.

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