



WALK-THE-TALK LEADERSHIP

Legitimacy in leadership is possible only through visible leadership. When a leader begins to behave in the way in which he/she wants others to be, such a leader will be more likely to be modelled as exemplary.



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Successful leaders of all kinds, all over the world have an honest understanding of who they are, what they know, and what they can do. Such leaders pave the road to great leadership by proving beyond doubt that they are worthy of being followed. Unfortunately, many people in so-called leadership positions are not true leaders. They may be managers, bosses, administrators, department heads, bureaucrats and technocrats but they are definitely, not leaders. On the other hand, certain individuals among us who contribute to society and bring out change in our midst may be rightfully referred to as powerful leaders in the real sense of the word. The leadership they have set in motion is not that of position but of action that precedes visible leadership.

Leadership styles

Effective leadership, irrespective of the approach or style, is

always an alignment of vision and values. Even in visible leadership, the most effective leaders are those who possess high vision and implement high values in every step they take.

Whenever there is an alienation of vision and values in an organisation, it is almost often because of the leader's inability to walk-the-talk and show a clear-cut relation between vision and values. Depending on the vision-value alignment and the level of clarity that exists between the two, four styles of leadership are known to emerge.

Low vision – low values: So-called leaders who fit into this style are not very initiators for the fear of taking risks. They are neither focused on the job nor on the team and can be easily influenced. Due to a distinct lack of clear principles, conviction or values, such people are better off as followers than leaders.

Low vision – high values: Leaders who adhere to this style are idealists who will go to great lengths to impose their rigid values and strong convictions upon the team. Their egoistic,

Visionary leaders are the master craftsmen of a new tomorrow



reactive attitude displays a marked insensitivity towards any resistance from team members. Though such leaders are extremely driven to perform, they are focused solely on the task and do not care about the people who make up their team.

High vision – low values: These leaders basically have very low standards and will stoop too low to get things done. Often portrayed as extremely driven and over-ambitious, such leaders display arrogance of the worst kind and love to boast of the power they are entitled to as leaders. They always see themselves under a threat and since they have very few options to reach their vision, such leaders ultimately destroy the team spirit in an organisation.

High vision – high values: These are the most effective leaders among the four. Always open, proactive, sensitive, humble and flexible, such leaders are the ones who will walk-the-talk and succeed in finding innovative solutions to counter ambiguity. They are always confident with a process-driven positive attitude and they build motivation into any team they choose to be in. Leaders with high vision and high values always create their own systems which in turn benefit the entire organisation.

Leading by example

Given below are a few of the world's greatest proponents of visible leadership.

Mahatma Gandhi: We must become the change we want to see" are the words of India's Father of the Nation. Mahatma Gandhi spent most of his adult life living what he preached to others. His commitment to non-violent resistance to protest injustice won him an admirable crowd of followers. His visible leadership created a picture of the possibilities that India could be free from the clutches of British rule.

Jack Welch (General Electric): This legendary businessman developed a whole new idea of a "boundary-less organisation" for GE. He promised to listen to ideas from anyone in the company and proved he was worth his word. Everyone, from the lowest line workers to the senior managers, got his attention

whenever they had some new idea that might make the company better. Jack Welch did not just "talk", he "walked" and his team was always willing to follow his lead.

E Sreedharan (Delhi Metro Corporation): Renowned as the "Metro Man of India", Elattuvalapil Sreedharan, Qimpro Platinum Standard Business 2007 award winner, is the power behind the success of the world-class Delhi Metro. As the Managing Director of DMRC, Sreedharan took up the Delhi Metro project under his wings and ensured its successful completion well-ahead of schedule. Even amidst bureaucracy and wide-spread corruption, he relied on his high vision and higher values to change the face of urban public transport in the capital state.

Carlos Ghosn (Nissan): Carlos Ghosn, former CEO of Michelin North America, was asked to lead this Japanese firm with the mission to bring about change and revive the Nissan brand. Ghosn had a middle-eastern and Latin cultural background, with French experiences. He was not well-versed in the Japanese language and was not familiar with the Japanese style of management. Many wondered if his turnaround strategy would do more harm than good for Nissan. However, under his leadership, Nissan reported the best financial performance in the history of the company, one year ahead of schedule. Ghosn's visible leadership style and Change Management Principle of consistency between what he thought, said and did was a key factor in Nissan's success.

Conclusion

The power of a leader to create an organisation's values, environment, culture and actions is far more intense than anyone can imagine. The best leaders are those who create better leaders. They "walk-the-talk", motivate others to follow their vision and achieve a set of goals in accordance with the mission of the organisation. In walking the talk, an important first step is to understand why a leader wishes to implement a change or improvement in his/her team or organisation. □

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