

Leadership

Leadership is...

“...creating an environment in which individuals are ready, willing and able, to take initiative, be creative, and get results.”

The above definition of leadership is reflective of our approach to management and leadership, based on the alignment of INDIVIDUAL and ORGANIZATIONAL goals. The end result of effective leadership is a high performing organization. *This* statement of leadership focuses on what the effective leader *does* to **build** and **sustain** that organization.

The focus of the leader’s *activity* is on creating an **environment** surrounding the people in the organization. This is based on the notion that *context* and *systems* have an overwhelming impact on the ability of individuals to succeed. As well, it means that the leader must listen to – and understand the real needs of – the people in the organization, both collectively and individually.

The statement of leadership highlights six critical components. The first component one must focus on is represented by the last two words in the statement: **“get results.”** To be able to “perform,” individuals in an organization need to fully understand what is expected of them. Therefore, the starting point of leadership is ensuring the individual has a very clear understanding of what results are expected, and thus, what one means by “success,” or “performance.” This is particularly important when an individual’s responsibility changes, or when the organization shifts its focus, either as a whole or at the individual’s department level.

“...get results.”

Knowing what results are expected, one can now identify the required *skills, knowledge* and *attitudes* to be able to produce those results. This puts the individual in the position of being **able** to meet the expectations, or in other words, having the requisite **COMPETENCE**.

“...able, ...”

However, it does not necessarily follow that the individual is *confident* that she or he can effectively *employ* the acquired knowledge and skills. These abilities have to be tried and tested, supported by feedback and coaching from the leader. The critical concern here is that the individual – in a state of learning – needs to be allowed to falter, and to make mistakes, without facing severe castigation; this is a very difficult challenge for most managers who know how to do well what they see their subordinates doing *not* so well, *...the first time!* After sufficient “exercise,” the individual *will* feel **ready**, through having **CONFIDENCE** in his or her competence.

“...ready, ...”

Finally – in this trio of ready, willing, and able – the individual may not automatically or intrinsically feel willing, or have sufficient commitment to the task. This requires alignment between the individual’s goals and those of the organization. This may generate the need for a significant amount of dialogue to ensure there is alignment with and acceptance of the organization’s mission and vision, and how the specific expected results “fit” with these statements of direction.

“...willing, ...”

With the presence of all these four elements – understanding the expected *results*, being *competent*, being *confident*, and being *committed* – the next requirement is for an atmosphere that fosters independent action without the anxiety of facing severe and inappropriate penalties for “mistakes.” It must be clear to people where mistakes are

“...take initiative, ...”

O.K., e.g., when the activity has never been done before, and where they are *not* O.K., e.g., on clearly defined procedures where accuracy and consistency are paramount. This atmosphere will result in individuals taking the **initiative** either to try new things, e.g., market testing new customer service approaches, or to excel in their execution of the defined, e.g., responding to customers in a prescribed manner.

The presence of all the above ingredients will allow the individual to display his or her natural **creative** talent – although it will come out in very different ways in different people. This, too, needs to be supported and encouraged, since for many of us, our creativity has been stifled so long, it needs to be stretched and exercised a bit to get it operating effectively.

“...be creative, ...”

Describing this approach is the easy part; putting mechanisms in place to clarify expectations, build the requisite skills and knowledge, allow people to exercise these new found abilities, and permit them to take risks and be innovative, is the challenge. Moreover, it requires the dedication and unswerving commitment of all management from the CEO through the first line supervisor.

Taking it personally

Taking another slice at this notion of leadership, the statement is just as relevant to an individuals taking accountability for their own personal and professional growth. The individual sets out her or his own desired “results,” then determines how best to acquire the requisite skills, knowledge, and perspective, tests out those attributes to gain confidence, reaffirms commitment to the desired direction, and explores different paths to get there.