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Person(nel) Development Resources

Leadership in Times of Uncertainty: Back to Basics

"When your oven is jammed and your bread is burning - that is when you will learn to use an oven. People can't learn in a classroom. True learning occurs 'just in time.'"

- Tom McMakin, COO, Great Harvest Bread Co.

In the wake of tragedy, leaders are faced with challenges that stretch their abilities and skills. In this global economy of rapid change and increasing complexity, many leaders struggle to lead their companies in the right direction. Now, more than ever, there is increased uncertainty, more complexity, and more chaos. What do you as a leader need to know?

Everyone is affected by the aftermath of September 11th. In times of crises, people look to their leaders. Where do you as a leader find guidance? Right now uncertainty, fear and doubt are more commonplace than usual. This saps our energy and, unless faced, can put us into a tailspin of negativity and helplessness.

An effective leader replaces uncertainty, fear and doubt with purpose, courage and trust. Purpose provides clear direction in the face of uncertainty. It is the energetic "magnet" that pulls people together and points them in a similar direction. Courage provides strength and commitment in the face of fear. Trust in one's self and one's purpose overcomes doubt.

Some say that in order to move forward, one must look back to the lessons of successful leaders of the past, and in particular, get back to basics. This article reviews basic leadership premises.

According to Warren Bennis, there are some 850 definitions of leadership. They range from the inspirational to the operational. Leadership ranks among the most researched and debated topics in organizational science. Leadership still remains an enigma, or like Bennis says, "it's like art, you can't define what it is, but you know it when you see it."

The problem is that we have taught managers and leaders how to plan, organize, staff, lead, and control organizations based on concepts and skills from the 19th century and the necessity to organize large numbers of people for wars.

The 21st century presents us with new demands. Terrorism does not follow the rules of war and organ-

ized combat. We are being asked to carry on with our business affairs in order not to be defeated by social and economic collapse. This requires leadership at all levels.

Leaders often find themselves painfully lacking in knowledge and skill, perhaps even paralyzed with guilt, anxiety, sadness or rage and unable to devise a strategy and set of behaviors that will work in these complicated times.

Even in this 21st century, the bio-psycho-social framework of organizations is still rooted in division

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of labor, hierarchy, leadership and follower-ship. Leaders at every level in any organization will need to formulate and implement different strategies for survival in this new world and new economy, even more so with new uncertainties.

The job of the leader is to get results. A leader must carve the problems into manageable tasks that can be clearly articulated and measured, and then maintain a relentless focus on achieving results through the implementation process.

Management is about coping with complexity: it brings order and predictability to a situation. However, that's no longer enough. To succeed, companies have to adapt to change. Leadership, then, is about *learning how to cope with rapid change*.

Leading or Managing?

How does this distinction play out?

1. Management involves planning and budgeting. Leadership involves *setting direction*.
2. Management involves organizing and staffing. Leadership involves *aligning people*.
3. Management provides control and solves problems. Leadership *stimulates motivation*.

In order to do so, great leaders inspire and motivate by holding up a guiding vision with passion; they model integrity, create trust, and boldly take risks with enduring optimism and faith.

Warren Bennis provides some basic tenants of good leadership in his classic book, *On Becoming a Leader* (1994). The first basic ingredient of leadership is a *guiding vision*. The leader has to be clear about what he wants to do, professionally and personally, and must show that he has the strength to persist in the face of setbacks and failures.

The second basic ingredient of leadership is *passion*: the passion for the promises of life, combined with passion for a vocation, a profession, a course of action. The leader who communicates passion gives hope and inspiration to other people.

The next basic ingredient of leadership is *integrity*, keeping commitments, doing what you say. It is the basis of *trust*. You can't have trust without integrity, and it cannot be acquired, but must be earned.

Two more basic ingredients are *curiosity* and *daring* (courage). The leader wonders about everything, wants to learn as much as he can, is willing to take risks, experiment, try new things. He does not worry about failure, but embraces errors, knowing he will learn from them.

Leadership Styles

Daniel Goleman proposes that the bedrock of successful leadership is emotional intelligence. The leaders who achieve the best results are emotional poly-maths, capable of combining emotional competencies into different leadership styles.

Here are the basic leadership styles from the Harvard Business Review article of Goleman (March 2000):

1. **Coercive**: demands immediate compliance
2. **Authoritative**: mobilizes people toward a vision
3. **Affiliative**: creates harmony and builds emotional bonds
4. **Democratic**: forges consensus through participation
5. **Pacesetter**: sets high standards for performance
6. **Coaching**: develops people for the future

Many studies have shown that the more styles a leader exhibits the better. Goleman says that those who master four or more styles create the best climates and performance. He identifies authoritative, democratic, affiliative and coaching as the four styles in combination as most able to influence organizational climate and performance positively. The most effective leaders switch flexibly among the styles as needed. They are sensitive to the impact they are hav-



ing on others and adjust their style to get the best results. Leaders who don't have all the styles available at their command can augment their styles by working with others whose styles are complementary, as with leadership teams. Another way is to expand one's repertoire of styles through development. *Many experts agree that coaching is the most effective method of developing leadership styles.*

Leaders apply the style that best suits the challenges of the present moment. Not unlike Blanchard and Hersey's *Situational Leadership*, Goleman says that leaders have to take into account the needs of the people being led as well as the situation at hand.

Bennis says that three things are at the top of the list for leading during a period of unprecedented and transformative change.

1. Staying with the status quo is unacceptable.
2. The key to competitive advantage will be the capacity of leadership to create the social architecture capable of generating intellectual capital.
3. Followers need from their leaders three basic qualities: direction, trust and hope.

Restructuring or re-engineering a company will not

produce the results needed for prosperity. It takes innovation. It means getting the best out of people by empowering them, supporting them and getting out of their way. Attracting and retaining talent doesn't happen under bureaucratic or command and control leadership. Intelligent leadership aims to release the brain power of knowledge workers.

A leader is a dealer in hope
— Napoleon Bonaparte

For Bennis, full, free self-expression is the essence of leadership. Leaders know who they are, what their strengths and weaknesses are, and how to fully deploy their strengths and compensate for their weaknesses. They also know what they want, why they want it, and how to communicate what they want to others, in order to gain their cooperation and support. They know how to achieve their goals. The key to full self-expression is understanding one's self and the world, and the key to understanding is learning from one's own life and experiences.



This ties in with the work done by the Hay McBer Group on emotional competencies. Self-awareness is the foundation for building competencies in the other three areas of emotional intelligence: self-regulation, social awareness and social skills. Leaders must develop their self-awareness in order to increase their leadership skills with others. The process of becoming a leader is much the same as the process of becoming an integrated human being. For the leader, as for any integrated person, life itself is the career.

Most of the research agrees:

1. Leaders are made, not born, and made more by themselves than by any external means.
2. No leader sets out to be a leader *per se*, but rather to express herself or himself freely and fully.

Leaders are all life-long learners and have taken charge of their learning. They are all concerned with a guiding purpose, an overarching vision.

"Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other."
—John F. Kennedy (1917-1963), from the speech prepared for delivery in Dallas on the day of his assassination, Nov. 22, 1963

How is Leadership Developed?

How does one acquire and develop leadership skills? New strategies and implementation methods must be based on the fundamental idea that individuals and organizations are becoming self-organizing, self-directing and self-regulating. Everyone working in organizations should be working to gain mastery of the concepts and skill of reflective self-awareness. As they do, they will be more productive and display the features of self-efficacy described by Bandura (1977, 1982). Leaders and players at every level in an organization who display self-efficacy are more resilient and therefore better able to mitigate the effects of stress, burnout and impairment.

The wicked leader is he who the people despise. The good leader is he who the people revere. The great leader is he who the people say, 'We did it ourselves.' —Lao-Tzu

The question then is how to develop self-awareness. Those who know and understand themselves well have increased skills in social and networking arenas; this shows up on the bottom line.



Richard Kilburg in his book, *Executive Coaching: Developing Managerial Wisdom in a World of Chaos*, says that executive coaching plays a central role in enabling individuals, teams and organizations to develop capacities. Organizations using coaches will increasingly see human wisdom being created and practiced by larger numbers of individuals and groups of people.

Behavior change that is sustainable and dependable under stress requires consistent encouragement, practice and feedback. High-level behavior changes also need time to develop, time to be tested in action and time to be refined. This cannot happen in a vacuum. Development occurs out loud, in relationship with others and within context, be it personal, business or organizational.

A quality executive coaching relationship will encourage key factors for developing leadership skills. Behavior change occurs when the following are present:

1. **Awareness and ownership** of the need for change
2. **Action** taken to effect change
3. **Repeated action** and practice in real-world situations
4. **Feedback** that is trusted and accurate (from peers as well as coach)
5. **Time** for new habits to develop
6. **Skilled coaching** in recognizing competing values and commitments as well as underlying assumptions and governing variables to mental models

Adapted from Ken Kesslin, Executive Talent, 2001

Executive coaches help leaders to develop skills of self-observation, self-awareness, self-responsibility and self-mastery. These skills allow leaders to continue to grow long after the coaching relationship ends.

Good coaches provide thought-provoking questions, personal exercises and assignments to help leaders maximize their unique gifts and talents. Coaching develops extraordinary leaders. Extraordinary leaders produce extraordinary business results (Kesslin, 2001).

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