

20 Foundations for Real Leadership

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I have often reflected on my time as a corporate manager and executive during the 70's and 80's. My summary would be this was a period when we over managed and under led. Today I believe there is a tendency by many to under manage and over lead.

There is so much focus on leadership I sense many of us have forgotten about management. My What Real Leaders Do and Fake Ones Don't presentations and programs respectfully yet severely challenge the status quo. Yet by far they are the most in demand and well attended of my work in my 15 year career as a business advisor and professional speaker. Leadership is a hot topic.

One of the reasons why leadership is hot is that there is a crisis of confidence in most of our leaders whether they hail from government, business, education or religion, the once four pillars of our society. I am seeing a hunger for insight into what real leadership is like never before. It's not quite a revolution, I suspect more an evolution. Nevertheless people from all walks and ways want to know about real leadership and are more than willing to dispel the myths and kill off the sacred cows. It's invigorating! A new generation of people who can lead and manage at the same time is emerging and they will get it right. Our very survival probably depends on it.

Leadership is the art of doing the right thing by people. Management is the science of doing things right so that people keep doing the right thing. Often leadership and management oppose one another. We need both operating in harmony. We must be able to lead and manage at the same time.

With gratitude to Warren Bennis, I would describe the main differences between leadership and management as follows

Leadership

People
Effectiveness
Knowing Why and What
Doing the Right Things
Influence
Relationships
Outcomes
Commitment
Innovation
Development
Trust

Management

Systems
Efficiency
Knowing How and When
Doing Things Right
Standards
Tasks
Processes
Competency
Administration
Maintenance
Control

Here are 20 foundations that when acted upon bring about more harmony between effective leadership and efficient management.

1. Real leaders walk the talk

Some people have heard the talk, don't believe it and therefore don't walk the talk. Some people have heard the talk, believe it, but don't walk the talk. Some people have heard the talk, talk the talk, but still don't walk the talk. Real leaders rarely talk the talk, they just walk the talk.

2. Real leaders ask more questions than they give answers

Any dummy can talk all day about what they know. Real leaders don't ramble, they ask questions in preference to giving answers, use words powerfully but sparingly and listen more than speak.

3. Real leaders share insight far more than information

When real leaders do speak they concentrate on sharing insight. Any fool can disseminate information. Real leaders see through the overload of information and share only what really matters.

4. Real leaders care about wisdom more than knowledge

Knowing what to do is one thing. Doing it successfully is another thing altogether. This is wisdom.

5. Real leaders have a cause beyond profit and power

The main reason we should be gathering together in networks of relationships (organizations) is to create value for others. Profit and power are legitimate but not real causes. Stand for something greater than these.

6. Real leaders focus on helping others achieve what is important to them

Zig Ziglar was 100% right. "Help others get what they want and you will get what you want." Self interest rules. Real leaders get what they want simply by helping others get what they want. This is the ultimate win / win.

7. Real Leaders are heroes in their own homes first

If you can't inspire your family forget about being inspiring for those you work with. If you can't communicate with your kids you've got no hope with anybody else.

8. Real leaders actually communicate

Communication has only occurred when two or more people have actually agreed on something even if that agreement is to disagree. Remember there are only two fundamental reasons for human conflict; disagreement about the direction / goal, or disagreement about how to get there / achieve it.

9. Real leaders bring everything they are to everything they do

I am amazed at how many people I have met who are terrific people in the general community but brain dead at work. To see life and work as separate is a recipe for unhappiness. The trick is to find harmony between what are two sides of a coin.

10. Real leaders inspire hope

Many citizens of planet earth have had their dreams shattered by war, famine and disease. Like no other time in history we must be leaders who inspire hope.

11. Real leaders manage energy, focus and systems

Leadership is about effectiveness, management is about efficiency. We need both. Effectiveness and efficiency require astute use of our energy and focus and the creation and maintenance of systems that support people in being the best they can be.

12. Real leaders understand and use common sense

Staggering as it is, common sense is often the most uncommon thing. Tap into universal, emotional, mental, and spiritual common sense. The physical senses of sight, smell, touch, hearing and taste are important but often just clues to truths far more important.

13. Real leaders live in the now yet clearly see the future

Now is the only time that really counts. However to not be clear on where we are going is a waste of the power of now.

14. Real leaders respect learning and are committed to life long learning

When we stop learning we die. Every action, transaction and interaction is an opportunity for learning.

15. Real leaders live a defined and measured set of values

To create value we must be valuable. Our worth to others has much to do with the values we live by. Many organizations parade their values however unless they are clearly defined and measured they are mostly just empty words.

16. Real leaders thrive on the challenges of possibility

Nothing is impossible. There is a solution to every problem and a way out of every difficulty. Life is meant to be challenging however all of the ancient texts promise us we are never challenged beyond our capability to triumph.

17. Real leaders laugh a lot, particularly at themselves

Telling stories that contain self depreciating humour are the most powerful form of influencing others to become better than they are.

18. Real leaders tell the truth as they see it

I have been thrown out of a few organizations because I told the truth as I saw it. I have no regrets.

19. Real leaders create a culture based on serving others

Create a culture based on serving others and you will draw customers to you like a magnet.

20. Real leaders are people of character

The most powerful force in the world is to be trusted. To be trusted means we must be people of genuine character.

Each one of us has the most incredible opportunity to make a profound difference to the lives of people we live, work and play with. It takes resolve, commitment and skill.

The previous 20 foundations of real leadership are powerful platforms to ensure we live a life that is a positive influence on others.

Ian Berry is a Possibility Activist.

He helps business leaders and owners discover possibility and how best to turn possibility into reality through finding the balance for you between the art of leadership and the science of management and the keys to your life / work harmony.

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