

The Leadership Challenge: Part II

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In our prior newsletter, I touched upon the overall business case for employing Effective Leaders. I have been fortunate to work closely with dozens of organizations ranging from small family-owned businesses to Fortune 500 companies who have achieved great success in establishing truly extraordinary places to work. These organizations not only generate top and bottom line, they offer employees incredible job satisfaction and growth, generating very low staff turnover. It is through these experiences that I can now safely share that the majority attribute their success directly back to the quality of their leaders. Their leadership team has simply mastered a "particular" skill set, which I refer to as the Twelve Essential Leadership Skills.

TWELVE ESSENTIAL LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Here at The Leadership Academy, we have designed a dynamic Leadership Model built upon the Twelve Essential Leadership Skills. This Model includes various customized, on-site workshops, involving specific organizational role-plays and case studies. I will be covering "six" of our Essential Leadership Skills here now and the following "six" in The Leadership Challenge Part III.

1. **COMMUNICATION:** Because leadership is situational, it would be difficult to prioritize the Essential Skills, as the relevance of particular skills varies with each circumstance. However, because virtually every situation requires the ability to communicate clearly and effectively, communication skills certainly ranks toward the top. The ability to effectively communicate -- to listen to what others have to say and then to express ideas in a clear, concise effective manner, is a crucial skill for leaders. It includes verbal communication and understanding non-verbal cues; effective written and visual communication; as well as the abilities to engage in one-on-one conversations or deliver a presentation to a room full of people. The essence of effective communication is making connections - understanding what others have to say and helping others understand what you have to say.

2. **FACILITATING AND IMPLEMENTING VISION:** Without vision - a picture or image of the organization's future, destiny, and purpose - there is little or no sense of purpose in leadership. Effective leaders must understand the organization's larger objectives and "reasons for being." With that purpose in mind, truly effective leaders explore the possibilities of what could be, facilitate a vision consistent with the organizations values and objectives, and then outline a plan to implement that vision -- a blueprint for working together to create the desired future.

3. **EXERTING INFLUENCE:** Leadership is not a title to claim or power to wield. Rather, leadership is the ability to attract followers - to influence others to follow their direction because they understand the leader's vision and *want* to follow the leader's direction. Effective leaders understand that the essence and source of leadership is the talent and ability to attract followers. Simply put, to lead means that others follow, and attracting followers requires the ability to influence others.
4. **TEAM BUILDING:** Effective leaders understand how to cultivate relationships in order to build and manage effective teams. Employee teams and strong teamwork add value to virtually every area of business. In recent years, work teams have consistently proven invaluable in promoting employee engagement, achieving process improvements, and increasing quality and productivity. Accordingly, effective leadership requires the ability to initiate and manage workplace teams, evaluate the success of those teams, and successfully influence team members to work in a coordinated and disciplined manner.
5. **LEADING WITH ETHICS & VALUES:** A primary source of a leader's credibility and "influence pool" comes from the trust and admiration of their "followers." In that regard, effective leaders exhibit the character deserving of followers – always treating followers with respect, honesty, and integrity. In other words, as leaders seek to facilitate and implement a strong organizational vision – the leader must understand the necessity to "do the right thing, at the right time, and in the right way."
6. **STRATEGIC DECISION MAKING:** Leaders make decisions. In fact, making decisions may be the most important function of any executive. It is also one of the toughest and certainly the most risky. Bad decisions can damage the organization, undermine careers, and potentially harm employees, customers, and the community. Effective leaders develop and utilize an approach to decision-making that puts enough options on the table to permit a thorough evaluation to ensure they can make a sound and reasoned choice – considering the full implications of the decision in the context of organizational vision as well as social and economic realities. A leader who is more skilled at making strategic decisions is much more likely to make rational and successful decisions for the benefit of the organization.

In our next Newsletter, we will examine the final Six Essential Leadership Skills. Stay tuned!