

Why Aren't There More Leaders?

By Mary Baker, OAWU Source Water Specialist

Why are people reluctant to answer the cry for leadership, at home, work, and within their community? This is an age-old question that needs some attention. There have been many myths and traditions about leadership that need to be explained so they can be broken.

Before I begin, I would like to take this opportunity to address a critical point in Jason Green's, OAWU Executive Director, Winter 2004 H2Oregon article. There is a difference between management and

leadership. An employee's workload, the daily operations, finances and the practices of an organization can be managed. But, people must be led, to get the job done. An effective leader can and will lead people not to just get the job done but to have the desire to "want to" get the job done.

Many believe that to be a leader you must possess some Merlin-like visionary power, be a "Take Control" type of person, or have a position in an organization that suggests leadership (those that are on top are automatically leaders). However our first challenge is to rid ourselves of these traditional management thoughts.

TRADITIONAL MANAGEMENT	NEW MANAGEMENT STYLE
An ideal organization is orderly, stable, and the processes runs like clockwork	Ordinary people, "when surveyed" say they are at there personal-best when challenged
Leaders have been portrayed in movies as renegades with bands of followers doing courageous defiant acts of heroism	Leaders attract constituents, not because of defiance, but by a deep faith in human capacity to adapt, grow and learn
Look at the short term benefit of the organization (quarterly statement, annual report etc)	Effective leaders look beyond the horizon, and at the future long term orientation of the organization
Leaders must possess some charismatic gift	Leaders are enthusiastic, energetic and have a strong belief in a purpose and the willingness to express that conviction
Persons of authority should be cool, aloof, analytical and separate emotions from work	Common emotions expressed by leaders include, inspiration, compassion, caring, kindness, elation, intensity and challenge
Management is primarily the "control" of time, money resources and people	Leaders do not command or demand control (generally the more people are controlled the less they will excel) they serve and support
It's lonely at the top!	Leaders get involved and are in-touch with those they lead, they care about others and commonly refer to those that they work with as family
Managers must detach from daily mundane work and invent great strategic plans "great policy promotes progress"	A leader's actions are far more important than words. Credibility of action is the single most determining factor if a leader will be followed over time. Never ask anyone to do anything you are unwilling to do yourself
Those that are on top are automatically leaders, leadership is position	Leadership is a process, involving skills and abilities useful on the front line or on Wall Street, its not a right of passage that goes with the position
Only a lucky few, born with the proper genetic structure, can decipher the leadership mystery and it cannot be learned	Leadership is an observable and learnable set of practices, everyone can learn to lead

Now that many of the common traditional myths have been identified let's look at leadership a bit further. Kouzes and Posner identified five fundamental practices of exemplary leadership that enable leaders to get things done. These five steps were further broken down into the ten commandments of leadership. These are:

Challenge the Process – 1) Search out challenging opportunities to change, grow, innovate and improve, and 2) Experiment, take risks and learn from mistakes.

Inspire a Shared Vision – 3) Envision an uplifting and ennobling future, and 4) Enlist others in a common vision that is appealing to their values, interests, hopes and dreams.

Enable Others to Act – 5) Foster collaboration by promoting cooperative goals and building trust, and 6) Strengthen people by giving power away, providing choice, developing competence, assigning critical tasks and offering visible support.

Model the Way – 7) Set the example by behaving in ways that are consistent with shared values, and 8) Achieve small wins that promote consistent progress and build commitment.

Encourage the Heart – 9) Recognize individual contributions to the success of every project, and 10) Celebrate team accomplishments regularly.

This is all well and fine but to truly be a leader we must also understand the needs of the workers as well. What qualities do workers want in their leaders? When workers were asked to select seven qualities they look for and admire in a leader, and someone whom they would willingly follow, the first four answers were regular, HONESTY, FORWARD-LOOKING, INSPIRING AND COMPETENT. Other responses such as being fair minded, supportive, intelligent, straightforward, dependable, mature, ambitious, caring and many more were also used.

Let us focus on the first four responses. **Honesty** is the consistency between word and deed. If someone practices what they preach people are

more willing to place their trust in that person. In order to convey a thought, idea or goal the person must be **forward-looking** and know where they are going if they expect others to willingly join them. A leader must be a person that is enthusiastic about a positive future and can communicate it to others so as to **inspire** them, their dreams and aspirations. If a leader displays no passion for a cause, why should anyone else? Last, but most assuredly not least, is **competency**. Credibility cannot be given to a person without a proven record of achievements. A leader must have the functional competency of the organization and operations before making critical decisions. There is also a general trend for needing a greater technical competence as well. A person should bring some added value to the position, have an expertise in leadership skills and be able to demonstrate the abilities to inspire, challenge, enable and encourage others if they are to be seen as capable. All this put together amounts to “Credibility” which is one of the hardest attributes to earn.

When workers perceive their employer as credible they are more likely to be proud to tell others they are part of that organization, feel a strong sense of team spirit, see their own personal values as being consistent with those of the organization, feel a sense of commitment to and ownership in/of the organization. These are all excellent reasons to justify the importance of leadership in the workplace, and in day-to-day dealings with other people.

Leadership is everybody's business. The next time you say to yourself “Why don't they do something about this?” Look in the mirror and ask the person you see “Why don't you do something about this?” Leadership is a daily personal challenge. The only limits are the limits that we place on ourselves. Leaders get extraordinary things accomplished, using proper leadership practices, while being just an ordinary person themselves. They are willing to take risks, be innovative, and experiment to make things better. They are not necessarily the creators of new products, services or processes, more than likely they are not! Their primary contribution is the recognition of good ideas and the willingness to implement them.

Being a leader is something most anyone can do, with practice, using the proper methods. Learn from all your mistakes and keep a positive outlook on life.

*I had the distinct pleasure of attending a “Leadership Oregon Program” which introduced me to a book, which has affected my life and the lives of those around me. This book, the reference for this article, entitled “**The Leadership Challenge**”, authored by Kouzes and Posner, copyright 1995.*