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LEADERSHIP IN INFORMATION MANAGEMENT



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Editorial Team,

TINTA (Leadership in Information Management)

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What Is Leadership?

By

Nur Iliana Binti Baharudin Shah

Arkib Negara Malaysia

Abstract

What does it mean to be a leader? Is it the title of President, Chairman, General etc? To me, it's more than that. No doubt about that where title are important, but they don't have much value when it comes to leading. True leadership cannot be awarded, appointed or assigned. However, it is also true that people who are awarded, appointed or assigned leadership positions, have a key role to play in society, and if true leadership is not within them, then at least some effort is needed to build their leadership capacity or else the teams they lead are doomed. Therefore, in leadership there are traits of leaderships which are having exemplary characteristic, passionate, confident, good leadership and tolerance.

Keywords: Leadership, Leader

"The true leader serves people. Serves their best interests, and in so doing will not always be popular, may not always impress. But because true leaders are motivated by loving concern rather than a desire for personal glory, they are willing to pay the price."

Eugene B. Habecker

What does it mean to be a leader? Is it the title of President, Chairman, General etc? To me, it's more than that. No doubt about that where title are important, but they don't have much value when it comes to leading. True leadership cannot be awarded, appointed or assigned. Leadership is not primarily a formal position. There have been great leaders who did not hold high positions, for example, Martin Luther King, Jr. It comes only from influence and it has to be earned. Being a leader in a mass of people is more than just having the name "captain". In other words, you don't need a title to lead. In fact, you can be a leader in your family, in your neighbourhood, or in your society, all without having a title. It's not the position that makes the leader; it's the leader that makes the position. However, it is also true that people who are awarded, appointed or assigned leadership positions, have a key role to play in society, and if true leadership is not within them, then at least some effort is needed to build their leadership capacity or else the teams they lead are doomed.

Leadership therefore is "that process" in which an individual influences an organized group (followers) to attain a common goal'. The goal is attained by mutual cooperation and cohesive behaviour. The ends of leadership involve getting results through others, and the means of leadership involve the ability to build cohesive, goal-oriented team (*Benedict, Redemptor*). For me a leader is someone who demonstrates extraordinary dedication to his or her team, and will do whatever it takes to better the team as a whole. Furthermore, the leader infuses a sense of positivity and directs others to reach the specified goal.

Leadership Traits

Every leader should have their qualities and characteristics, but in order to define good leadership characteristics it is ambiguous. This is because a different leader has their own leadership traits and characteristic. However, there are some common features required for a leader such as;

1. Exemplary Characteristic

A good leader has an exemplary character. It is of utmost importance that a leader is trustworthy to lead others. A leader needs to be trusted and be known to live their life with honesty and integrity and in doing so earns the right to have responsibility for others. True authority is born from respect for the good character and trustworthiness of the person who leads. (*Hub Pages Inc. 2011*). Leaders establish principles concerning the way people should be treated and the way goals should be pursued. They create standards of excellence and then set an example for others to follow. Because the prospect of complex change can overwhelm people and stifle action, they set interim goals so that people can achieve small wins as they work toward larger objectives. They unravel bureaucracy when it impedes action, they put up signposts when people are unsure of where to go or how to get there, and they create opportunities for victory.

2. Passionate

A good leader is passionate about their work or cause and also about their role as leader. People will respond more openly to a person of passion and dedication. Leaders need to be able to be a source of inspiration, and be a motivator towards the required action or cause. Although the responsibilities and roles of a leader may be different, the leader needs to be seen to be part of the team working towards the goal. This kind of leader will not be afraid to roll up their sleeves and get dirty. Leaders who build passionate teams really appreciate their people, not just their employees. People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. It is easy to appreciate the top performers who bail you out of tight spots. However, it is more challenging, but more meaningful, to appreciate everyone on your team regardless of their relative contributions. (*Lee Colan. 2011*)

Leaders passionately believe that they can make a difference. They envision the future, creating an ideal and unique image of what the organization can become. Through their magnetism and quiet persuasion, leaders enlist others in their dreams. They breathe life into their visions and get people to see exciting possibilities for the future. This is where they passionately inspire shared vision to the team.

This is also the traits that makes a leader go for what they believe they can make it happen. Like the quotes or saying " be the Do-er, Don't just watch and wonder what happened, but make it Happen." A passionate leader will bring the positivity to the teams also.

3. Confident

In order to lead and set direction a leader needs to appear confident as a person and in the leadership role. Such a person inspires confidence in others and draws out the trust and best efforts of the team to complete the task well. A leader who conveys confidence towards the proposed objective inspires the best effort from team members. When we're confident, we will spend more time doing and very little time worrying about what we do. It's not that we shouldn't think. We should seek data from multiple sources, reflect on options, and make thoughtful decisions. Those are good action steps. (*Matthew. 2011*)

People with self confidence can become achievers. They propel themselves to the frontlines of activity and shoulder responsibility without waiting for rewards. They are people who would like to lead the team rather than be led. They are confident about their skills and abilities. They learn lessons from every issue and create a bank of experiences that can be put to use in any situation. Self confidence gives the edge to a person's personality and pushes him towards the leadership bracket.

Many people in the faculty or even at workplace aspire to be leaders, but are very content to be led by others. This happens because of low self esteem. When people compare themselves to leaders, they tend to say 'he/she has many capabilities', 'I have none of his skills' which, when examined deeply will point out that these skills and capabilities can be cultivated by all and one. Confidence without doubt stems from knowledge and competence. People, who want to be in the action sphere, will go all out to hone their skills in the face of competition. They will overcome their handicap and work out ways 'to be up to date. Otherwise, for people, which have low self esteem. They do not want to take a step out of their comfort zones, because they lack the belief that they can also meet new challenges.

This belief is what pulls down their confidence in their abilities. Building self confidence requires the 'warrior mindset, not being afraid of defeat. The warriors seldom run away from a frightening enemy. They are ready to pit their skills and tactics against the opponent. Their self esteem is more important to them than winning or losing. Their mind is tuned to face the situation with courage. Even at the workplace, we need courage and confidence to meet situations that may be the ultimate test of our professional 'warrior' skills. When we win, we become leaders and role models. Those who run away from situations are never considered for any future roles of responsibility (*K. V. Rajasekher*).

Like Thomas Carlyle said "Nothing builds self-esteem and self-confidence like accomplishment." To become a leader one needs self confidence and self confidence can only come if you achieve your set objectives repeatedly. You may fail, but with each failure your desire to win becomes more intense and with each win your self confidence goes up a notch higher (*K. V. Rajasekher*).

4. Good Attitude & Toleration

Attitude determines towards our life. Most people are capable, but don't possess the drive to tap into their undeveloped potential. The drive comes from knowing that you can do it because you have a positive attitude about us. Our environment is a mirror of our mental attitude. If we don't like what we see, we have to change our way of thinking before we can change anything else. The best way to practice having a good attitude is by walking, acting and looking as though we belong to a group of positive thinkers. Actions trigger feelings, just as feelings trigger attitudes. Try to find good and exciting aspects of anything that may annoy or anger us. Life is dull and irritating only to those who are dull and negative. When we can find something interesting in everything we see and everyone we meet, life becomes interesting and our attitude will improve. A person must look, act and feel successful before they achieve success. (*about.com.2011*)

Good leaders are tolerant of ambiguity and remain calm, composed and steadfast to the main purpose. Storms, emotions, and crises come and go and a good leader takes these as part of the journey and keeps a cool head. The leader is able to take and tolerate risk. Almost by definition, change projects involve a lot of risk. People who have been successful project leaders for traditional projects may be unable to change their behavior and take the risk of stepping into uncharted waters. Instead, they may, perhaps unconsciously, turn away from risk-bearing activities. In doing so, they may turn away from potential opportunities, and condemn the project to failure. It's not the role of the change leader to carry out all the changes, but to make sure the changes occur. Project leaders who have always been hands-on may find it difficult to find the right balance between leadership and involvement in the details. (*John Stark. 2000*)

To sum up, great leaders therefore choose their leadership style with a calculated analysis of the matter at hand, the end goal and the best tool for the job. If you look at some of the world's greatest leaders, the likes of like Martin Luther King Jr, Mahatma Gandhi, and Nelson Mandela, who led masses, gained appreciation, are held in high regard for their work, and their lives inspire many, you will notice that they have varying degrees of the different leadership qualities, and have used them depending on the situations they confronted. There is a saying by Jack Welch, ' Before you are a leader, success is all about growing yourself. When you become a leader, success is all about growing others '. Therefore, being a leader in any environment also need sacrifices as we not only speak and act for oneself but as a whole. As for me in my past being the President of Information Management Association for 2 term break really taught me to be unique and also the leadership traits I was able to sharpen during the period had built me to whom I am today. What important being the leader of the community is that like the saying of Sheryl Sandbe "Leadership is about making others better as a result of your presence and making sure that impact lasts in our absence."

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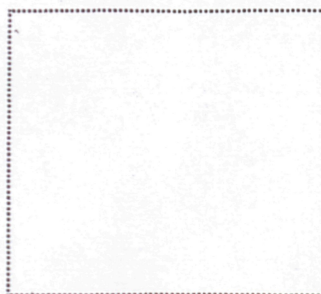
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