

Leadership as a Craft

There is an age-old question about which many writers love to share their opinions. The question is this: Are great leaders born or made? The question is moot. We know, of course, that some people come into this world with qualities and personalities that make the road to leadership a little easier, but it is most important to recognize that becoming a leader is within the reach of all.

Why? Because it is a craft. It is a craft that can be learned. It is a craft that can be practiced, and it is a craft that can be mastered. So, how are we to be guided in this craft? Today, there are countless books advancing all sorts of leadership models, many have some merit. They all, however, fail to address the four fundamental questions that all leaders must address:

1. Have you earned the right to lead?
2. Do you help others perform at their best, continually learn, and accelerate their development?
3. Does your team produce extraordinary results through constant innovation and superb execution?
4. Are those you lead aligned in pursuit of the organization's mission-critical objectives?

Leadership is a most challenging endeavor. Today's organizations are excruciatingly complex, diverse, and ever-changing. When we consider the development of our leaders today, we must now do so against a backdrop of shifting technology, globalization, and demographics. Never has quality leadership been needed more and never has it been in shorter supply.

The good news is that leadership proficiency can be learned and developed. In my work, I see examples every day of highly committed men and women at all organization levels increasing their leadership effectiveness. Whether or not they were born with natural charisma or not, they are choosing to act like great leaders act. They are choosing to act in ways that create the answer "yes" to the four questions above.

So, how does one act like a great leader? The following behaviors are essentially positive answers to these questions. Take a moment to rate yourself on the craft of leadership.

1. To earn the right to lead:

- I treat others with dignity and respect.
- I accept personal responsibility for my actions and mistakes.
- I seek out and am receptive to feedback.
- I model the behaviors I expect of others.
- I follow through on commitments.
- I put the interests of others before my own.

2. To help others perform, learn, and develop:

- I ensure that every member of my team feels appreciated.
- I look for the best in others.
- I challenge others to perform at their best.
- I coach others on their career development.
- I hold others accountable for important outcomes.
- I help every team member excel in his or her job.

3. To create an extraordinary team:

- I encourage members to make improvements in all systems and processes.
- I create a work environment that encourages innovation.
- I promote breakthrough thinking.
- I ensure milestones are clear and, after reaching them, celebrated.
- I treat mistakes, errors, and setbacks as valuable learning opportunities.
- I craft winning strategies with my team.

4. To create exceptional alignment and engagement:

- I create and convey a compelling image of the future.
- I ensure that every person's job is significant.
- I help build shared organization values.
- I communicate crystal clear plans and strategies.
- I articulate the deeper meaning and importance of the organization's work.
- I speak about the organization with enthusiasm, passion, and conviction.

Becoming a good leader is not easy but neither is becoming a good writer, a good doctor, nor a good electrician. Great leadership is a career-long pursuit but a craft well worth the effort.

Source

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