

Knowing Where I am as a Leader?

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"A woman in a hot air balloon realized she was lost. She reduced altitude and spotted a man below. She descended a bit more and shouted: 'Excuse me, can you help me? I promised a friend I would meet him an hour ago but I don't know where I am.' The man below replied, 'You're in a hot air balloon hovering approximately 30 feet above the ground. You're between 40 and 41 degrees north, latitude, and between 59 and 60 degrees west, longitude.'

'You must be an Engineer,' said the balloonist. 'I am,' replied the man, 'how did you know?' 'Well,' answered the balloonist, 'everything you have told me is probably technically correct, but I've no idea what to make of your information and the fact is, I'm still lost. Frankly, you've not been much help at all. If anything, you've delayed my trip by your talk.'

The man below responded, 'You must be in Management.' 'I am,' replied the balloonist, 'but how did you know?' 'Well,' said the man, 'you don't know where you are or where you're going. You have risen to where you are, due to a large quantity of hot air. You made a promise, which you've no idea how to keep, and you expect people beneath you to solve your problems. The fact is you are in exactly the same position you were in before we met, but now, somehow, it's my freaking fault.'"

How many of you can relate to these two personalities? They're rather like the computer techies who blind you with their jargon and the managers who appear to be blindsided by their real role. Better still, while management is an important and valuable component to running an organization, it is nowhere near as valuable as leadership.

To more precisely contrast the two: managers are driven by a problem solving force, but through a system which retains control over everything within its orbit so as to remain secure. Leadership, on the other hand, is an opportunity force that attracts all the required components around it like a magnetic power to accomplish what's required. For that reason, people cannot resist leaders.

Our reality is that some of us always will be managers, based upon our upbringing and the way our mind works. About 7-12% of the population at large are natural leaders, although spread throughout all sectors of society. The remainder has differing proclivities toward leadership, but these need to be better defined and focused so that they will be viewed more as leaders rather than as managers.

Before we go any further to espouse particular leader attributes, it is important to emphasize the value of management. We need it for encouraging efficient use of resources, as well to ensure "things are done right." It also brings greater stability and predictability to situations: things that both workers and shareholders respectively rely upon. Management also ensures that critical steps are meticulously planned and that shareholders are properly taken care of. However, the bold truth is that most workplace people don't wish to be managed, they desire to be led.

Within that context, aspiring leaders need to know where they are at. They need to have a clear framework of attributes that will enable them to be recognized as genuine

leaders. It is not possible within this sound bite society to possibly state all leader areas to be covered. Even so, here are six key talents to start the ball rolling:

- **Success strategist** – Leaders have to be effective *pathfinders* and constant opportunity seekers. They need to be good *positioners* to acutely understand how well they are situated to succeed. Objective executive studies show they often don't have the strategy, knowhow, resources or personal talents to win in their current situation. Coupled with this, leaders need to be *relentless focusers*, not controllers, to bring their domain ongoing success.
- **Sound judgment** – Good people, business/organization instincts; a wise and impartial approach; firm convictions; being a creative thinker; bringing fiscal/profit insights; and having a progressive view are all essential.
- **Organization builder** – Being aware of your team's capabilities; to challenge and negotiate with it; to pick the right people; know where to acquire resources; and to build a dynamic team or enterprise culture are crucial.
- **Alliance grower** – Being an external or internal bridge builder with one's peers, own leader and "outsiders"; plus personal negotiation abilities; are so valuable.
- **Stakeholder attuned** – Being highly attuned to stakeholder expectations; giving vital assists on mutual interests; being a strong connector and relationship builder are all key leader prerequisites.
- **Emotionally intelligent** – With leadership aura; showing consistency in relationships; having a sense of optimism; keeping one's feelings well focused; and being positive about people; these all bring untold value dimensions.

Above all, 21st-century leaders will differ from their predecessors in one significant way. They will not be obsessed with "making money." Instead, they will be obsessed with giving *all* constituents (customers, alliances, suppliers, workforce, leaders/managers and owners) an "exceptional experience." Success with this absent latter approach will earn them plenty of money; whereas the "money makers" too often shoot themselves in the foot.

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