



Management Bulletin

North Carolina State Laboratory of Public Health | Laboratory Improvement Unit

Leadership Skills

When you think of “good leaders,” who comes to mind? Gandhi? Thomas Jefferson? Winston Churchill? Some people seem to be born leaders but there is more to leadership than meets the eye.

What is Leadership?

Leadership is guiding a group of people to a common goal. Great leadership involves bringing out the best in people. Dwight D. Eisenhower defined it as “getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it”. Leadership is not the same as managing. Managing includes ensuring the group is focused and producing desired results. Not everyone can be a good manager, but there are tools available to create a good leader.

Required Skills of Effective Leaders

- Self-awareness – knowing one's strengths, weaknesses, drives, values, and impact on others.
- Self-regulation – controlling or redirecting disruptive impulses and moods.
- Motivation – relishing achievement for its own sake.
- Empathy – understanding other people's emotional makeup.
- Social Skill – building rapport with others to move them in desired directions.

We are all born with certain levels of these traits. They can be strengthened, if needed, using certain tactics.

Self-Awareness

People who have a high degree of self-awareness recognize how their feelings affect them, other people, and their job performance. They have high self-confidence, a realistic self-assessment, and a self-deprecating sense of humor. They are able to speak openly and accurately about their limitations and their strengths and crave constructive criticism.

Self-Regulation

People who are in control of their feelings and impulses are able to create an environment of trust and fairness. It seems to have a trickle-down effect. A calm boss usually discourages irrational employees. Managers with strong self-regulation adjust to change more easily by withholding premature judgment and adapting to change without resistance. Many negative events are created from impulsive behavior. Appropriate self-regulators are usually thoughtful and resist making impulsive decisions. These are definite qualities of a good leader.

Motivation

Effective leaders have the ability to motivate. They possess a passion for their work and a drive to achieve and motivate others to achieve. They seek challenges, love to learn, take great pride in their work, and are committed to the company. They remain optimistic, even when the challenges ahead may seem overwhelming.

Empathy

Of all the qualities, empathy is the easiest to recognize. Possessing empathy does not mean being overly emotional. It simply means taking other people's feelings into account before making decisions that will affect them. Empathy plays an important role in team development and employee retention. An effective leader considers the viewpoints of all team members before making decisions.

Social Skill

Social skill has more to do with building relationships than the first qualities. Empathy and motivation also play important roles in building relationships. Socially skilled people create bonds with others,

which will create more cooperation from them in the future. They may appear to only be socializing, but creating relationships with co-workers and other leaders can be very useful.

Leader Versus Manager

Managers promote stability and cope with complexity. Good managers encourage order and consistency. Managing involves planning, budgeting, organizing, staffing, setting a direction, controlling, and problem-solving - not very glamorous duties.

Leadership is very different. Leadership involves motivating and inspiring others, not by pushing them but by satisfying their need for achievement, sense of belonging, recognition, and self-esteem. This creates a powerful response.

Conclusion

You may have heard of a highly skilled individual who was promoted to management only to fail... or an ordinary individual who was given a leadership role and soared. It seems that IQ and technical skills are not as important to a leader as most think. An employee can have excellent training and loads of ideas, but not be successful in a leadership role. A good leader needs more. Self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill are all qualities of a good leader.

“Lead and inspire people. Don’t try to manage and manipulate people. Inventories can be managed, but people must be lead.”

~Ross Perot

Karen Wall, BSMT (ASCP)

References:

1. Goldman, Daniel, “What Makes A Leader?” *Harvard Business Review*, January 2004.
2. Kotter, John P, “What Leaders Really Do?” *Harvard Business Review*, December 2001.