The Role of Leadership in the Management of Organizational Transformation and Learning

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Leadership nowadays bears a heavy burden. Leaders must create visions, must know how to articulate them, and must be able to implement them (Bennis, 1989). They must create learning organizations (Senge, 1990). They must create, embed, evolve and change culture (Schein, 1992). They must be charismatic (Conger, 1989). They must be servants rather than masters (Greenleaf, 1977). And in all of this they must be authentic, credible, wise, and decisive (Kouzes, 1993; Kotter, 1990).

I would like to add another set of "musts" to this list, but to be a bit more specific than many of the prescriptions offered nowadays. We are in an era where organizations are under tremendous pressure to transform themselves, yet we have lots of evidence that this process of unlearning the old and learning the new is not going very smoothly. Reengineering and quality efforts are often not successful. Downsizing is causing massive pain and loss of morale. Innovations such as Saturn are gradually undermined. And the creation of "learning organizations" is painfully slow. And so, my question is this: What can formal leaders, those empowered by current hierarchies, do to improve this situation? My answer is that leaders should use their power to make learners feel psychologically safe instead of threatened. Change models have put far too much emphasis on the disconfirming aspects of unfreezing and not nearly enough on the creation of psychological safety for the change targets. And it is the formally appointed leaders who are in a unique position to provide such psychological safety, yet they often see their role to be that of disconfirmer or threatener.

Having identified how leaders can facilitate learning, I will point to the constraints that operate in western managerial culture and to the role that the OD function can play in dealing with those constraints.

Learning Anxiety and Survival Anxiety.

I have previously argued that generative learning of the sort that is required for organizations to genuinely transform themselves involves the balancing of two kinds of anxiety (Schein, 1993). *Learning Anxiety* is the fear and tension that accompanies the learning of something new. New learning, especially when it involves unlearning something, produces anxiety because adaptive learning in individuals, groups, and organizations tends toward stability. We seek to institutionalize those things that work. We seek predictability and meaning. We seek novelty only when most of our situation is pretty well stabilized and under control. Instability or unpredictability or mean-

inglessness are uncomfortable because we do not know what is ahead. The unpredictable is potentially threatening. We also know from our own past experience that when we have to unlearn something in order to learn something new there will be a period of incompetence and loss of identity that is painful. Only if I have a high level of motivation will I subject myself to the trauma of giving up my incorrect golf or tennis swing in order to learn a better one. Learning anxiety is the ultimate basis for resistance to change and it is entirely normal.

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But learning anxiety is not the only anxiety in the picture. We all recognize from various kinds of disconfirming cues that we have to learn some new things, that our present routines and habits of perceiving, thinking and feeling are not producing enough of the kinds of results we expect and hope for. If things are going well, we will continue in our adaptive mode, but if we discover that our expectations, hopes, and dreams are not being met, we experience what we can call *survival anxiety*, or guilt. If, as many predict, the economic, political, technological, and socio-cultural global environment will become more turbulent and unpredictable, then new predicaments will emerge and the solutions we have developed will become increasingly inadequate. We will discover that if we do not change and learn how to learn, things will go badly–we will experience more survival anxiety and guilt.

The dilemma of generative learning, then, is how to manage the psychological situation of being damned if we do and damned if we don't, of having one kind of anxiety if we decide to become learners and another kind of anxiety if we decide to risk staying put. For generative learning to begin, we can state the general proposition that survival anxiety must be greater than learning anxiety. Somehow we must reach a point where the fear or guilt associated with not learning is greater than the fear associated with entering the unknown, the unpredictable and the state of temporary incompetence.

On the personal level, this is the state that precipitates our going to a therapist or counselor, or to a tennis or golf camp to take some more lessons, or to a human relations workshop to get some insight and feedback. On the organizational level, this is the state that precipitates reorganizations, the calling in of consultants, reengineering or downsizing efforts, the firing of CEOs and the various other activities that we have observed in organizations that feel they are in deep trouble and in need of learning something new. What these situations have in common is that survival anxiety or guilt is greater than the anxiety associated with learning something new.

As we think about this from the perspective of leaders, especially those who are personally motivated to produce learning and change in their organizations, the question is how do they make sure that survival anxiety is greater than learning anxiety? Logically there are two ways of accomplishing this goal. The method I observe most often is that the manager escalates survival anxiety by making change non-negotiable, by threatening, by shaming and by various other devices. This is often the method of choice because it is entirely within the manager's control. We can threaten the learner in various ways or provide such strong incentives for learning that the prospect of losing what the incentives offer serves to escalate survival anxiety and guilt. For example, my boss might make me feel that if I don't learn to use the electronic mail system and conduct my meetings with the latest groupware I will not get promoted in this organization. At that point, logic would dictate that I begin to learn something new and overcome my resistance to the computer. That is what the boss hopes for.

Unfortunately, we don't always do what logic dictates. Our learning anxiety may be so high that we may become defensive, misperceive the situation, deny reality, rationalize, become hostile and attribute incorrect motives to the managers. Or, if forced into a change program, we may learn only superficially, eventually fail, and then wonder what happened, or worse, blame others for our failure. Especially in relation to the introduction of sophisticated information technology tools, consultants frequently complain that the clients do not learn the tools to a sufficient level of competence to gain the productivity increases that are promised and possible. The problem here is not that we have been bad to have done this. None of us can tolerate very high levels of learning anxiety, so we need to develop psychological defenses that reduce the survival anxiety.

Change oriented managers often give up in frustration at this point and retreat to the rationalization that it is "human nature" to resist change. In that frustration they overlook a second way to achieve the state of having survival anxiety be greater than learning anxiety, namely, to reduce learning anxiety.

We can concentrate on making the learner feel more comfortable about the process of learning, about trying out new things, about entering the perpetual unknown, about being temporarily incompetent. In fact, if the world is already as unpredictable as most pundits allege, most of us already have enough survival anxiety just from the daily disconfirmation we experience. Most of us already know at some deeper level that our old habits are no longer adequate coping strategies. From the trivial problems of not knowing how to program our VCRs to the complex problems of not knowing how to organize ourselves for more productive output, we already have plenty of survival anxiety and guilt. What we need from our leaders is help in coping with our learning anxiety.

If things are going well, we will continue in our adaptive mode, but if we discover that our expectations, hopes, and dreams are not being met, we experience what we can call 'survival anxiety,' or guilt.

Creating Psychological Safety to Reduce Learning Anxiety.

How then do leaders, as change agents, reduce learning anxiety? How can they make learning, even perpetual learning, a safe and desirable process? There are eight overlapping and related mechanisms or processes that produce psychological safety. They are cumulative and, in principle, should all be created simultaneously.

1. Provide a Positive Vision of the Future. Instead of threatening learners with scenarios of disaster if they don't learn, leaders can provide them a vision of a better future that makes it worthwhile to put in some effort, run some risks, and tolerate some pain. Developing a positive vision for ourselves, the group we belong to, and the organization we work for can become very important in facilitating learning. Sometimes leaders actually provide such visions but often it is the learners themselves that create it if leadership is supportive, and such involvement reduces resistance to change.

2. Involve the Learners in the Process. Involvement of the learners can be anything from giving them a voice in setting the ultimate targets to giving them some voice in determining how the day-to-day learning process itself will be managed. Often the targets are non-negotiable and hence simply have to be imposed by the leader. But the learner can still get involved in deciding how the learning process will be implemented. Such involvement is crucial to the reduction of learning anxiety because much of that anxiety has to do with perceptions of what it will be like to actually try to learn something new, i.e. fear of what others will think, fear of making a fool of oneself, fear that one will be "slower" than the others, etc.

The point is that the manager leading a change effort should not second guess these fears and try to fix them a priori, but, rather, involve the learners in a process where they can design the learning situation to reduce some of those fears. For example, in learning how to manage a computer, some learners might have a strong preference for individual cubicles rather than an open room with many terminals, and it would be more cost effective to provide them, rather than to risk partial learning in an open environment that left the learners too self-conscious.

3. Create a Climate of Support and Encouragement. Leaders have to reassure learners that learning something new will not cause a loss of identity or a loss to their overall sense of competence. Learners will not embark on a path that they perceive to be destructive to their sense of self-worth. Friendly and supportive encouragement from the leader in the role of manager and/or teacher/coach is essential to creating this kind of climate. Ridicule, impatience, putting down early attempts at learning, and any other negative behavior will immediately exacerbate all the learning anxiety.

4. Provide a Practice Field, a Safe Learning Environment. One of the most common mistakes organizations make is to try to create a generative learning situation on the job. While it is true that adaptive learning can be managed effectively on the job, it is absolutely

impossible for people to re-examine their basic assumptions and to try new ways of perceiving, thinking and feeling while trying to be productive in terms of the old assumptions, habits and routines. As Senge has noted, leaders have to provide a practice field where it is OK to take time out, to make mistakes and to take the time to analyze and learn from them. One of the main reasons why we do not learn from our mistakes is that we immediately go on to the next action and fail to reflect on why the mistake occurred, what it meant subjectively, and how our behavior might be changed. Organizations that take time away from work to do postmortems of their major actions, that review major decisions, and that conduct post-hoc analyses of their operations are much more likely to facilitate generative learning.

Providing practice fields means giving people (1) some time off to learn; (2) a place where they can play around, experiment, and practice; and (3) the necessary resources and facilities to practice new ways of behaving. It is in the practice field where coaches, consultants, teachers and fellow learners have their biggest impact because in the safety of practice we can listen and begin to hear alternatives that we may have never before had the mental freedom to entertain. It is in the practice field where learners can be taught some of the necessary tools of learning so that they can continue learning on their own. For example, they can be taught to take some time after each major action or decision to reflect on why they did what they did and what consequences it had. One of the most destructive scenarios many organizations are caught in is trying to create generative learning while pressing for productivity, downsizing and in other ways reducing both the time and the resources needed for learning.

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5. Provide a Clear Direction and First Steps. In order to get the learning process started, leaders must provide some direction and show people what the first steps might be. Often the source of learning anxiety is that the learner simply does not know where to start or how to go about it. Giving the learner some direction–a "yellow brick road," and a little guidance on how to get started can be crucial in reducing learning anxiety. I remember vividly my embarrassment some years ago when I wanted to learn how to use a word processor and, in the company of several colleagues, could not find the "On" button which had cleverly been put at the back of the terminal "to keep people from accidentally hitting it with their knees."

6. Create a Group Setting for Learning. There is a good deal of evidence that when we are anxious we seek out others, primarily to share our anxiety and to get some sense of not being all alone in a difficult situation. Starting the learning process in groups is, therefore, an important principle. If I see that I am not alone in being anxious, temporarily incompetent, and slow in catching on, it makes it easier to keep going. In a way this is paradoxical because learners also do not want to make fools of themselves in front of others, so a group process only works if it is combined with learner involvement and a climate of support.

There is also a growing body of research done by the *Institute for Research on Learning* that suggests that some kinds of learning can only be done in groups because one needs the practical insights and support of peer group members to acquire the particular concepts, skills and know-how. For example, kids who cannot learn math in the classroom learn it very fast as members of gangs involved in the financial aspects of dealing drugs. The more complex the new learning, the more likely it is that the learning has to be supported ultimately by peer group members who have gotten the concept and can pass it on at the practical level. In other words, the best teacher is likely to be a peer group member who is slightly more advanced in the learning process than the learner. Leaders must be aware of this and facilitate such group/peer learning rather than focusing primarily on themselves as teachers.

7. Provide Role Models and Coaching Help. When complex new concepts or skills are involved in the generative learning effort, it is essential to be able to learn through psychologically identifying with someone who already has mastered the new way of thinking and acting. Coaches must not only be able to guide the

learners but also must provide examples of how the new way of thinking and behaving looks and feels. Here again we have a paradoxical situation in that the role model must be sufficiently far along to be able to demonstrate the new, yet not so far along that the learner cannot identify with him or her. From this point of view, the best coaches are usually recent learners who can still remember what the problems of learning were all about. Using the computer as an example once again, I can learn far more from a colleague who has recently mastered a program than from a virtuoso hacker who is likely to be impatient with my level of incompetence. But the leader often has to be the coach in the early stages to demonstrate the direction of learning that is desired, i.e. he/she must "walk the talk."

Another essential element of good coaching is to provide useful feedback during practice periods. It is especially important to reward even the smallest steps in the direction of learning, lest the learner gets discouraged and assumes, often correctly, that the coach doesn't care anyway. The evidence is overwhelming that rewarding correct steps is far more effective than punishing mistakes. In either case, the main guiding principle should be to be helpful by which I mean "do that which will most help the learner to learn, allowing for individual and situational differences." Where one learner may need hand-holding another may need to be left alone to work things out; where one situation may call for demonstrations of how to do something differently, another may call for the learners to figure out a new method for themselves.

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8. Create Norms and Incentives that Encourage Embracing of Errors. Eighth, and most important of all, leaders must provide a climate in which making mistakes or errors is viewed as being in the interests of learning, so that, as Don Michael has so eloquently noted, we come to embrace errors rather than avoid them because they enable us to learn (Michael, 1985).

Though these conditions might be difficult and expensive to implement, they are not mysterious. We do know how to get a learning process started. What we know much less about is how to keep learning processes going. And that gets us to the issue of cultural constraints, particularly some of the western cultural assumptions of managerial effectiveness.

Cultural Inhibitors: Assumptions About Managerial Effectiveness

The dilemma of creating conditions for effective organizational transformation is that the very leaders who have to create the conditions outlined above are burdened by their own history and the myths they have probably bought into in arriving at their leadership position. What are these myths and assumptions?

1. The Myth of Male Dominance. Human history has left us with a legacy of patriarchy and hierarchy, and a myth of male dominance and superiority based on the male as the warrior and protector. One can think of this as almost a state of "arrested development" in the sense that we have very limited models of how humans can and should relate to each other in organizational settings. The traditional hierarchical model is virtually the only one we have and to arrive at a position of formal leadership requires one to be willing "to climb the ladder."

2. The Importance of Being in Control. One consequence of this set of historically-based cultural assumptions is that managers (who are mostly male) start with a self-image of having to be completely in control, decisive, certain, and dominant. Neither the leader, nor the follower wants the leader to be uncertain, to admit to not knowing or not being in control, to embrace error rather than to defensively deny it.

In reality, of course, leaders know that they do not know all the answers, but few are psychologically strong enough to be able to admit this and to share power with others in their organization. And, since the subordinates also demand of the leader a public sense of certainty, they reinforce the facade that leaders adopt. Yet, if organizational learning is to occur, leaders themselves must become learners and in that process begin to acknowledge their own vulnerability and uncertainty.

3. The Force of Rugged Individualism. In the U.S. we have the additional cultural force of the "rugged individualism" that makes the lone problem-solver the hero. The dependent cooperative team player is not typically a hero. Competition between organizational members is viewed as desirable, as a way to identify talent–"the cream will rise to the top," while teamwork is viewed as a practical necessity. If teamwork were more natural, "team building" would not be the popular topic it is in the field of organization development. Individual competition is perceived to be the natural state, while the search for community is viewed as a sign of weakness. Groups as problem solvers are viewed with suspicion and the notion of group accountability or group rewards is almost totally rejected as unworkable and unsound. Individual accountability is management's sacred cow.

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4. The Divine Rights of Being a Manager. Another myth that has grown up in managerial circles might be identified as the myth of the divine rights of managers (Schein, 1989). I have often heard senior managers defend secrecy around the financial condition of their company on the grounds that employees "have no right" to that information. Management is viewed as having certain prerogatives and obligations that are intrinsic and that are, in a sense, the reward for having worked oneself up into management.

5. Leaders are More Expert, Skilled and Wise than Their Followers. A closely related myth is that leaders, by virtue of their successful climb to the top, are more expert, skilled and wise than their subordinates. As the late Karl Deutsch, the eminent MIT political scientist, once put it, "power is the ability not to have to learn anything." The relatively young and egalitarian social structure of the U.S. emphasizes achievement over formal status, and so we have, as yet, no clear class structure that provides people position power in society. Hence, they have to rely on earned power as represented by organizational position, title and visible status symbols such as cars, fancy homes, and other material symbols. Given this situation, it is not surprising that once one has been promoted into a managerial position one wants to use one's authority, to act like a boss. Otherwise, what was the point? The competition-based work hierarchy ultimately becomes the main source of security and status, and therefore, higher level managers can be expected to act in a more decisive and controlling manner to express that status. In other words, power that is earned or achieved through individual competition corrupts all the more in a society that does not have an aristocracy or class structure as an alternate source of status.

6. The Separation of Self From Work. Another barrier to creating safe learning environments is the fact that work roles and tasks are very compartmentalized in the U.S. These roles are separated from family and self-development concerns, and they are supposed to be treated in an unemotional and objective manner. This separation makes it very hard to examine the pros and cons of organizational practices that put more emphasis on relationships and feelings. Even to talk about anxiety in the work context is taboo.

Within the work context, we have the further problem that task issues are always given priority over relationship issues. We build relationships only if they are pragmatically necessary, but we automatically pay attention to the demands of a task even if that forces us to sacrifice relationships. Our task-focus is typically viewed as the strength of western management. Latin and Asian preoccupations with building relationships are viewed as time wasters and irrelevant.

7. Management is Only About the "Hard-Things." A major set of cultural constraints to learning is the myth that management can be sorted into "hard" and "soft" things. Our public images of management, the depiction of management in textbooks and other literature, the implicit model of management held by many teachers of business, all proliferate the notion that management deals with hard things such as data, money, bottom lines, payoffs, production, competition, structure. And it is even better if these hard things can be quantified.

Everyone pays lip service to the notion that people and relationships are important, but basically our society's assumptions are that the real work of managers is with quantitative data, money, and bottom lines. People are de facto treated as nothing more than another resource that can be manipulated like any

other resource. In this model, people and their feelings are not the primary focus of management. If we have any doubts about the reality of this myth, consider how many performance appraisal and potential systems in our organizations prefer to reduce both performance and potential to numbers rather than dealing with qualitative descriptions of performance and leadership potential.

This bias shows up most clearly in graduate schools of business where the popularity of quantitative courses in finance, marketing, and production, is much greater than the qualitative courses in leadership, group dynamics or communication. If one examines the implicit assumptions about people held by professors of economics and finance, one will find that, in their theories, people are assumed to be machine-like, rational actors, not humans with feelings. Though they will argue that this model is a necessary convenience for theorizing, teaching from such a model, nevertheless, sends a strong message to all business students that people are just another resource, not a prime factor of concern to management.

8. Management is Short-Term Oriented. Associated with the myth that management is only about hard things, is the myth that management is basically a short-time horizon occupation. Driven by reporting systems, managers learn early on to pay close attention to the progress of their financial numbers than to the progress of the morale or development of their employees. To create an environment for learning is a long-range task, and few managers feel they have the luxury to plan for people and learning processes.

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What all of this adds up to is that it is one thing to specify what leaders should do to create the conditions for learning that is generative and perpetual, but it is quite another thing to get there, given some of the strong cultural inhibitors that are acting on leaders and followers all the time. The first and most necessary step, however, is a frank appraisal of reality. If we understand our cultural biases, we can either set out to overcome them (which is a slow process), or, even better, figure out how to harness them toward more effective learning.

Ultimately, an organization's culture cannot be judged except in relation to some goal it is trying to accomplish. If learning is our goal, then we must figure out how to become effective learners with the culture we have. Because even if we decided that some elements of our culture were dysfunctional, it is not likely that we could quickly produce culture change. Such change is itself a long and slow process. How then do we proceed?

Proactive Pragmatism

I believe that one mechanism by which culture change occurs is to re-prioritize some of the shared assumptions that conflict with other shared assumptions. For example, I believe that the U.S. is a very proactive, pragmatic, task-driven culture and that such pro-active pragmatism will eventually force leaders to pay more attention to people, to teamwork, to relationship building and dialogue. As we discover that competition and rugged individualism fail in solving important problems, leaders will experiment with other forms of organizing and coordinating . Initially, they may do it only because it is pragmatic. But gradually they will discover the power of teamwork in getting certain tasks done better and the learning that comes from the experience. As mentioned earlier, groups are anxiety-reducers and, in the end, we will do more things together because the levels of both learning anxiety and survival anxiety will be higher than ever. So, if I allow myself a bit of optimism I think our proactive pragmatism will eventually force leaders into creating the conditions for the learning identified above.

The Role of Organization Development

Implicit in the above argument is a message for the organization development field and its practitioners. If OD focuses on collaboration, teamwork, and relationship building as its prime ideology and value system, it is taking a counter-cultural position and, thereby, putting itself into a power struggle with the existing managerial culture.

If, on the other hand, the ultimate purpose of OD is to be helpful to organizations and to managers in accomplishing their mission, then we must sympathize with the leadership dilemma, understand the cultural assumptions by which most managers have been socialized, and help them to see that collaboration, teamwork, and relationship building are pragmatic necessities for certain kinds of tasks, not ideologies to be bought into willy nilly.

For example, I find that team building is often touted as a general solution to organizational problems, even in situations where the task interdependence is so low that there is no need for teamwork. In this kind of situation, the OD practitioner can help leaders analyze more precisely, the tasks to be accomplished and determine where there are true interdependencies that require collaboration and teamwork (Schein, 1995). As long as we are in a task driven, pragmatic culture, OD must help organizations to think more clearly about tasks, and let managers learn for themselves the need for groups, teams, collaboration and relationship building.

All too often we get irritated with our clients instead of truly understanding the cultural assumptions that drive them. We can spell out, as I have done above, what the leader must do to transform organizations, but we cannot impose this as a prescription. We can only hope that if our own pragmatism and cleverness are sufficient, leaders will catch on to what they must do and will seek our help in getting there. ■

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Leadership Is Everyone's Business and Other Lessons from Over a Dozen Years of Leadership Research

James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner

Beyond the horizon of time is a changed world, very different from today's world. Some people see across that horizon and into the future. They believe that dreams can become reality. They open our eyes and lift our spirits. They build trust and strengthen our relationships. They stand firm against the winds of resistance and give us the courage to continue the quest. We call these people *leaders*.

In the early 1980's we set upon a quest to discover what it took to become one of these leaders. We wanted to know the common practices of ordinary men and women when they were at their leadership best–when they were able to take people to places they had never been before. But knowing that the portrait emerging from the study of personal-best leadership cases was only a partial picture, we also explored the expectations that constituents have of leaders. Strategies, tactics, skills, and practices are empty unless we understand the fundamental human aspirations that connect leaders and constituents. Our analysis of thousands of cases and surveys from over a dozen years of research has revealed a consistent pattern of exemplary leadership practices and fundamental constituent expectations (Kouzes and Posner, 1995).

In this article we discuss several lessons we've learned from thousands of venturers about what it takes to get extraordinary things done in organizations, and we examine some implications for the practice of organization development.

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Lesson 1. Credibility Is the Foundation of Leadership.

The cynics are winning. People are fed up, angry, disgusted, and pessimistic about their future. Alienation is higher than it has been in a quarter century, so says an article entitled "That Shut-Out Feeling" in a 1993 issue of *Business Week*. Loyalty to institutions, and institutions' loyalty to people is sinking like a stone. No longer would we rather fight than switch; we just switch. Nearly half the population is cynical, and cynics don't participate in improving things (Kanter and Mirvis, 1989).

In such a climate, how can a leader possibly mobilize a seemingly unwilling constituency toward some unknown and even more uncertain future? For the answer to this question, we turned to the constituents, the followers. We have asked thousands of people what they "look for and admire in a leader, in a person whose direction they would willingly follow." The consistent winners: honest, forward-looking, inspiring, competent leaders.

Three of these characteristics–honest, competent, and inspiring–comprise what communication experts refer to as "source credibility." In assessing the believability of sources of information, whether they are newscasters, salespeople, managers, physicians, politicians, or priests, researchers typically use the three criteria of trustworthiness, expertise, and dynamism. Those who rate more highly on these dimensions are considered to be more credible sources of information. What we found in our investigation of admired leadership qualities is that, more than anything, people want leaders who are credible.

Credibility is the foundation on which leaders and constituents build the grand dreams of the future.

People want to believe in leaders. People want to have faith and confidence in them. People want to believe that their word can be trusted, that they are personally excited and enthusiastic about the direction in which they are headed, and that they have the knowledge and skill to lead. Credibility is the foundation on which leaders and constituents build the grand dreams of the future. Without credibility, visions will fade and relationships will wither. We call this the "first law of leadership." *If people don't believe in the messenger, they won't believe the message.*

At the core of personal credibility are one's beliefs. (Credibility derives from the Latin word credo, meaning "I believe.") People expect their leaders to stand for something and to have the courage of conviction. If leaders are not clear about what they believe in, they are much more likely to change their positions with every fad or opinion poll. The first milestone on the journey to leadership credibility, therefore, is clarity of personal values.

What are the implications for organization development practitioners?

The capacity to win the personal credibility jackpo depends on how well people know themselves. To b credible, leaders must know who they are and wha they stand for. Early in an intervention, OD practitior ers can engage leaders in a process of self-discover By involving them in developing and articulating a clea set of guiding principles–a leadership philosophy–th better they know themselves and the better they ca align words and deeds.

The efficacy of any change initiative is inextricabl linked to the credibility of the person(s) leading th effort. Constituents will become willingly involved t the extent that they believe in those sponsoring th change. It is wise, then, to begin every engage ment with a "credit check" of the leaders.

Lesson 2. Leaders Don't Wait.

When Dr. Charlie Mae Knight wa appointed the new superintendent fo the Ravenswood School District in Eas Palo Alto, California, she was the twelfth superintendent in ten years. She encountered a district in which 50 percent of the schools were closed and 98 percent of the children were performing in the lowest percentile for academic achievement in California. The district had the state's lowest revenue rate. There were buckets in classrooms to catch the rain leaking through decrepit roofs, the stench from the rest rooms was overwhelming, homeless organizations were operating out of the school sites, and pilfering was rampant. Gophers and rats had begun to take over the facilities. As if this weren't challenging enough, Knight had to wrestle with a lawsuit that had gone on for ten years, whose intent was to dissolve the district for its poor educational quality and force the children to transfer to schools outside of their community.

These challenges would discourage almost anyone. But not Knight. After assuming the post, she immediately enlisted support from Bay Area companies and community foundations to get the badly needed resources. The first project she undertook was refurbishing the Garden Oaks School. Volunteer engineers from nearby Raychem Corporation repaired

the electrical wiring and phone systems. A volunteer rat patrol used pellet guns to eliminate the pesky rodents from the site. The community helped paint the building inside and out, and hardware stores donated supplies.

Before too long, local residents began calling to find out what color paint was used for the school so they could paint their houses in a matching shade. They went out and bought trees and sod and planted them in front of their homes. New leadership came forth from parents who began to demand more of a say. In response, an "Effort Hours" program for parents was set up so that they could volunteer time at the school. Teachers began to notice that something was happening, and they wanted to be part of it too. The district was on a roll.

If you're going to lead now or in the future, the first thing you've got to do is launch a voyage of discovery.

Within two years of Knight's arrival, the children exceeded the goal of performing in the fifty-first percentile on academic achievement scores. (Today one of the district's schools has climbed to the sixty-eighth percentile, miles above the first percentile where they had started.) The district was one of the first schools in the state to use technology in every discipline, outdistancing every school in California technologically, and it was the first elementary school to join the Internet. The lawsuit has been dropped. Revenues went up from $1,900 per student to $3,500. And for the first time ever, East Palo Alto received the state's Distinguished School Award, based on its improved test scores and innovative programs.

If we are going to have a future, let alone thrive in one, we learn from Knight that leaders don't wait (in fact they can't wait) for grand strategic plans to be completed, new legislation to be passed, or consensus to be built. Like other leaders who achieve extraordinary results, Knight knew she had to produce some early victories. "It's hard to just get anybody excited about a vision. You must show something happening." She further said, "Winning at the beginning was so important, because winning provided some indication of movement. I had to show some visible signs that change was taking place in order to keep up the momentum, and in order to restore confidence in the people that we could provide quality education."

Leaders seize the initiative. Starting a new organization, turning around a losing operation, greatly improving the social condition , enhancing the quality of people's lives demands spirit and action. Waiting for permission to begin is not characteristic of leaders, but acting with a sense of urgency is. If you're going to lead now or in the future, the first thing you've got to do is launch a voyage of discovery.

What are the implications for OD practitioners?

Make something happen. In our well-intended efforts to thoroughly diagnose the situation, to craft artful change programs, and to build broad consensus we stall progress. By all means, be true to intervention theory and practice, but also get things moving. Focus on small wins–things like fresh paint and clean school yards. Set up little experiments instead of grand transformations. Transformation is a scary word. It may even discourage people. It may also fuel cynicism. Little successive victories earn the leaders a lot of credit, and they inspire confidence.

Lesson 3. Leaders Focus on the Future Possibilities.

At 3:29 p.m. on October 15, 1978, a team of ten women accomplished something that no other group had ever done. The *American Women's Himalayan Expedition* was the first American climbing team to reach the summit of Annapurna I, the tenth-highest mountain in the world. Arlene Blum was the leader of the expedition. Her stirring account of that adventure, *Annapurna: A Woman's Place*, is a highly acclaimed adventure story (Blum, 1980). But why should someone, whether man or woman, want to do something like that?

"For us, the answer was much more than 'because it is there,'" said Blum. "We all had experienced the exhilaration, the joy, and the warm camaraderie of the heights, and now we were on our way to an ultimate objective for a climber–the world's tenth-highest peak. But as women, we faced a challenge even greater than the mountain. We had to believe in ourselves enough to make the attempt in spite of social convention and two hundred years of climbing history in which women were usually relegated to the sidelines." Blum talked about

how women had been told for years that they were not strong enough to carry heavy loads, that they didn't have the leaders hip experience and emotional stability necessary to climb the highest mountains. After a climb of Mount McKinley in 1970, her personal faith in the abilities of women climbers was confirmed.

"Our expedition would give ten women the chance to attempt one of the world's highest and most challenging peaks, as well as the experience necessary to plan future Himalayan climbs. If we succeeded, we would be the first Americans to climb Annapurna and the first American women to reach eight thousand meters (26,200 feet)."

Not only do constituents demand that leaders be credible, they also demand that leaders be forward-looking: that they have a sense of direction, a vision for the future. Credibility is the foundation of leadership, but the capacity to paint an uplifting and ennobling picture of the future differentiates leaders from other credible sources.

Little successive victories earn the leaders a lot of credit, and they inspire confidence.

Blum saw what others had not seen. She imagined something for her group that went far beyond the ordinary, far beyond what others thought possible. For Blum, it was proving that women are capable of doing things that others had thought impossible. She, and the other leaders in our study, shared the characteristic of "envisioning the future," of gazing across the horizon of time and imagining that greater things were ahead. They foresaw something out there, vague as it might appear from the distance, that others did not. They imagined that extraordinary feats were possible, or that the ordinary could be transformed into something noble.

The overwhelming consensus is that without vision, little can happen. All enterprises or projects, big and small, begin in the mind's eye. They begin with imagination and with the belief that what is merely an image can one day be made real.

What are the implications for OD Practitioners?

Climbing a mountain is a wonderful metaphor for leading organizational change. The summit is the vision. You always keep that pinnacle in mind as you prepare for and make the ascent. Don Bennett, the first amputee to climb Mt. Ranier, said that he imagined being on top of the mountain 1,000 times a day. But how he got to the top, he said, "was one hop at a time." Vision and action are the yin and yang of leadership. OD practitioners can support leaders in making something happen, by helping them to constantly clarify and communicate an inspiring common vision. Without a clear view of the future, constituents will be as nervous as tourists driving the Pacific Coast highway in the fog.

Lesson 4. Leaders Affirm Shared Values.

As important as it is for leaders to articulate their vision and values, what they say must be consistent with the aspirations of their constituents. Constituents also have needs, interests, dreams and beliefs of their own. If leaders advocate values that are not representative of the collective will, then they will not be able to mobilize people to act as one. Leaders must be able to gain consensus on a common cause and a common set of principles. They must be able to build a community of shared values.

We have examined carefully the relationship between personal and organizational values, and our studies show that shared values:

- Foster strong feelings of personal effectiveness.
- Promote high levels of loyalty to the organization.
- Facilitate consensus about key organization goals and stakeholders.
- Encourage ethical behavior.
- Promote strong norms about working hard and caring.
- Reduce levels of job stress and tension.
- Foster pride in the organization.
- Facilitate understanding about job expectations.
- Foster teamwork and esprit de corps.

People tend to drift when they are unsure or confused about how they ought to be operating. The energy that goes into coping with, and repeatedly debating, incompatible values takes its toll on both personal effectiveness and organizational productivity. Consensus about long-and short-term values creates commitment to the organization's vision and strategy.

i.e., where it is going and how it's going to get there. Although leaders do not wait for anyone, if they don't build consensus on vision and values then they will be all alone!

This dynamic tension between building consensus and creating forward momentum constantly pulls at leaders. We have learned that constituents expect leaders to be able to clearly articulate a vision of the future and to take a firm stand on principles. We have also learned that shared visions and values produce more successful organizations and healthier people. To turn this tension into action, exemplary leaders have to have their heads in the clouds and their feet on the ground. They know how to maintain the focus on exciting future possibilities while finding the common ground among constituents' diverse aspirations.

What are the Implications for OD Practitioners?

In order to take that first step toward renewed organizations–and a second, and a third–people must agree on some fundamentals. A helpful intervention requires coming to agreement on a desired culture, i.e., a common set of operating principles about how things will get accomplished. It also means skillful management of conflict. Helping your clients pool their abilities to achieve "wholeness incorporating diversity," as scholar and *Common Cause* founder, John Gardner, calls it. and ensure that their stated values go beyond the poster-on-the-wall, laminated-wallet-card stage. RoseAnn Stevenson (1995), organization and management development manager at Boeing, analyzed a set of values statements from seventy-seven different companies and found nineteen commonly identified values. But she also found little agreement on the meaning of each of these values statements. She found, for example, that there were 185 different behavioral expectations around the value of integrity alone. A common understanding of values comes about through dialogue; it emerges from a process of dialogue, not a pronouncement.

If leaders advocate values that are not representative of the collective will, then they will not be able to mobilize people to act as one.

Lesson 5. Leaders Can't Do It Alone.

Early in our research we asked Bill Flanagan, vice-president of operations for Amdahl Corporation, to describe his personal best. After a few moments, Flanagan said that he couldn't do it. Startled, we asked him why. Flanagan replied, "Because it wasn't *my* personal best. It was *our* personal best. It wasn't me. It was us."

Leadership is not a solo act. In the thousands of personal-best leadership cases that we have studied we have yet to encounter a single example of extraordinary achievement that occurred without the active involvement and support of many people. We don't expect to find any in the future either.

Creating competition between group members is not the route to high-performance; fostering collaboration is–particularly if the conditions are extremely challenging and urgent. Author and university lecturer Alfie Kohn (1986) explains it this way: "The simplest way to understand why competition generally does not promote excellence is to realize that trying to do well and trying to beat others are two different things." One is about accomplishing the superior while the other is about making another inferior. One is about achievement while the other is about subordination. Rather than focusing on stomping the competition into the ground, true leaders focus on creating value for their customers, intelligence and skill in their students, wellness in their patients, and pride in their citizens. In a more complex, wired world the winning strategies will always be based upon the "we" not "I" philosophy.

Exemplary leaders make other people feel strong. They enable others to take ownership and responsibility for their group's success. Long before "empowerment" was written into the popular vocabulary, credible leaders knew that only when their constituents felt strong, capable, and efficacious could they ever hope to get extraordinary things done. Constituents who felt weak, incompetent, and insignificant consistently under performed, wanted to flee the organization, and were ripe for disenchantment, even revolution.

When we examine the times when people feel powerless and the times when they feel powerful, we are struck by the clear and consistent message: feeling powerful, literally feeling "able," comes from a deep sense of being in control of our own lives. When we feel able to determine our own destiny, when we believe we are able to mobilize the resources and support necessary to complete a task, then we will persist in our efforts to achieve. But when we feel we are controlled by others, when we believe that we lack the support or resources, we may comply but we show no commitment to excel (Bandura, 1990; 1986). Credible leaders choose to give away their own power in service of increasing another's sense of self-confidence, self-determination, and personal effectiveness. Making others more powerful is truly what enhances the possibilities of success.

Although leaders do not wait for anyone, if they don't build consensus on vision and values then they will be all alone!

What are the Implications for OD Practitioners?

Organization development has probably contributed more to advancements in teamwork and trust than any other field of practice. Our roots are in group dynamics and our heart is in personal growth. But as practitioners, we sometimes become enamored with new, often faddish, movements. While it is important to innovate continuously, we should never forget that our foundation is grounded in the behavioral sciences.

For OD to be successful in the future, bonds have to be strengthened between leaders and constituents. Our practice will thrive to the extent that we and our clients are competent and confident in the fundamentals of interpersonal relations. This is our heritage, this is our future, and this is our legacy.

Lesson 6. The Legacy Leaders Leave Is the Life They Lead.

The first thing Les Cochran did after becoming university president at Youngstown State University in July 1992 was to purchase an abandoned building on the edge of campus and spend his free weekends working with construction crews to transform it into a residence for his family. While it is not unusual for college presidents to live near their campuses, Cochran's determination to do so attracted a great deal of attention and set the tone for his presidency.

To many, Cochran was literally putting his life on the line, for the once lovely neighborhoods surrounding YSU had surrendered to increasingly aggressive gangs and escalating drug-related crime following the collapse of Youngstown's steel mill dependent economy in the early 1980s. Cochran believed that the only way to reclaim YSU from the fear, hopelessness, apathy and mistrust that paralyzed the campus and the surrounding community was to start the process by claiming as his home one of these decaying neighborhoods. His message was clear: "We are responsible, both individually and collectively, for the fate of this community." Thus, when he declared "Together We Can Make a Difference," his philosophy of individual contribution to community involvement, people knew he believed deeply in what he was saying. By buying and refurbishing a home in an area he was determined to reclaim for YSU, Cochran "walked the talk."

When asking others to change, as Cochran did, it is not enough for leaders to deliver a rousing speech. Much as compelling words are essential to uplifting spirits, Cochran and other leaders knew that constituents are moved by deeds. They expect leaders to show up, to pay attention, and to participate directly in the process of getting extraordinary things done. Leaders take every opportunity to show others by their own example that they are deeply committed to the aspirations they espouse. Leading by example is how leaders make visions and values tangible. It is how they provide the evidence that they are personally committed. That evidence is what people look for and admire in leaders, people whose direction they would willingly follow.

In our extensive research on leader credibility, we asked people to tell us how they would know if someone is credible. The most frequent response: "They do what they say they will do" (Kouzes and Posner, 1993). Example-setting is essential to earning credibility. When it comes to deciding whether a leader is believable, people first listen to the words, and then watch the actions. A judgment of "credible" is handed down when the two are consonant.

How you lead your life is how people judge whether they want to put their lives in your hands. If you dream of leaving a legacy then you'd better heed the Golden Rule of Leadership: DWYSYWD: Do What You Say You Will Do.

What are the Implications for OD Practitioners?

The truest test of credible leadership is what leaders pay attention to and what they do. Leaders are judged by how they spend their time, how they react to critical incidents, the stories they tell, the questions they ask, the language and symbols they choose, the measures they use, and their design of physical space. Every organizational assessment should include an audit of these dimensions. To find the clues you'll have to follow the leaders around for a few days and hang out with them in their own settings. Interviews and survey questionnaires just don't cut it when it comes to trying to determine whether leaders do what they say.

Help leaders to look in the mirror. Help them become conscious of the messages they are sending with their actions. And help them to improve the alignment between what they practice and what they preach so that they set the example for others.

Lesson 7. Leaders Keep Hope Alive.

Employees at *Synergistic Systems, Inc.* located in Los Angeles' San Fernando Valley, have always known Jean Campbell, founder and CEO , to be positive, organized, enthusiastic, personable, caring and unflappable. Campbell's leadership had been tested many times since 1984 when she started and began growing this computer-based medical billing company. The company is now a trusted firm that employs 200 people and handles over $200 million in charges for more than 1,200 physicians in 84 medical groups nationwide. Yet never had Campbell been as challenged as she was on the days following Monday, January 17, 1994, when at 4:31 a.m., a major earthquake rumbled through the San Fernando Valley, shaking her world to its very foundation.

Credible leaders choose to give away their own power in service of increasing another's sense of self-confidence, self-determination, and personal effectiveness.

On Monday afternoon, as she inspected SSI's 25,000 square foot tile ceiling lying collapsed on the floor, its 28 foot high south wall pulled 10 inches off its concrete base, its overturned desks, scattered files, and leaking ceiling pipes, she saw that she had "a no-business business." To others the goal of being fully operational within two weeks might have seemed impossible. Not to Jean Campbell: to her it became a mission.

Working closely with IBM Business Recovery Services, Campbell began going through a logical review of critical business requirements. From a business in shambles, Campbell organized, planned, listened, reassured and motivated Syners (as the SSI employees call themselves) and contractors alike to restore essential services within 48 hours and full services in less than 10 business days.

With reconstruction complete, Jean Campbell held a Town Hall meeting on February 2, declaring "It's time to celebrate our victory, with all those who helped to bring it about, and to give heartfelt thanks to so many..." Campbell knew all too well that the climb to the summit was arduous and steep. People became exhausted, frustrated, and disenchanted. They often were tempted to give up. Leaders, like Campbell, encourage the heart of their constituents to carry on. With genuine acts of caring they uplift the spirits and sustain hope.

What are the Implications for OD Practitioners?

Individual recognition and group celebration are crucial to sustaining change efforts. People need to know that someone is paying attention to their hard work. When people are asked to go beyond their comfort zones, the support and encouragement of their colleagues enhance their resistance to the possible debilitating effects of stress. And if reward systems are not aligned with new norms and new forms, the new structure is destined to collapse. To assure long-term success make sure that you encourage your clients to say "thank you" in as many ways as they can.

Lesson 8. Leadership Is Everyone's Business.

Myth associates leadership with a superior position. It assumes that leadership starts with a capital "L," and that when you are on top you are automatically a leader. But leadership is not a place; it is a process. It involves skills and abilities that are useful whether one is in the executive suite or on the front line, on Wall Street or Main Street.

And the most pernicious myth of all is that leadership is reserved for only a very few of us. The myth is perpetuated daily whenever anyone asks, "Are leaders born or made?" Leadership is certainly not a gene, and it is most definitely not something mystical and ethereal that cannot be understood by ordinary people. It is a myth that only a lucky few can ever decipher the leadership code. Our research indicates that leadership is an observable set of practices that can be learned. In over fifteen years of research we have been fortunate to hear and read the stories of over 2,500 ordinary people who have led others to get extraordinary things done. There are millions more. If there is one singular lesson about leadership from all of the cases we have gathered it is this: leadership is everyone's business.

A common understanding of values comes about through dialogue; it emerges from a process not a pronouncement.

Just ask Melissa Poe (1993) of St. Henry's School in Nashville, Tennessee. On August 4, 1989, as a fourth-grader fearful of the continued destruction of the earth's resources, Poe wrote a letter to President George Bush, asking for his assistance in her campaign to save the environment for the enjoyment of future generations.

After sending the letter, Poe worried that it would never be brought to the president's attention. After all, she was only a child. So, with the urgency of the issue pressing on her mind, she decided to get the president's attention by having her letter placed on a billboard. Through sheer diligence and hard work, the nine-year old got her letter placed on one billboard, free of charge, in September 1989–and founded *Kids for a Clean Environment* (Kids F.A.C.E.), an organization whose goal is to develop programs to clean up the environment.

Almost immediately, Poe began receiving letters from kids who were as concerned as she about the environment. They wanted to help. When Poe finally received the disappointing form letter from the president it didn't crush her dream. She no longer needed the help of someone famous to get her message across. Poe had found in herself the person she needed–that powerful someone who could inspire others to get involved and make her dream a reality.

Within nine months more than 250 billboards across the country were displaying her letter, free of charge, and Kids F.A.C.E. membership had swelled. As the organization grew, Poe's first Kids F.A.C.E. project, a recycling program at her school, led to a manual full of ideas on how to clean up the environment. Poe's impatience and zest motivated her to do something, and her work has paid off. Today there are more than 200,000 members and 2,000 chapters of Kids F.A.C.E.

Poe is proof that you don't have to wait for someone else to lead. You don't have to have a title, you don't have to have a position, and you don't have to have a budget.

By viewing leadership as a set of character traits with which one is born or as equivalent to an exalted position, a self-fulfilling prophecy has been created that dooms societies to having only a few good leaders. It is far healthier and more productive for us to start with the assumption that it is possible for everyone to lead. If we assume that leadership can be learned, we can discover how many good leaders there really are. Leadership may be exhibited on behalf of the school, the church, the community, the scouts, th e union, or the family. Somewhere, sometime, the leader within each of us may get the call to step forward.

Certainly we should not mislead people into believing that they can attain unrealistic goals. Neither should we assume that only a few will ever attain excellence in leadership or any other human endeavor. Those who are most successful at bringing out the best in others are those who set achievable but stretching goals and believe that they have the ability to develop the talents of others.

From what we observed in our research, as more and more people answer the call, we will rejoice in the outcome. For what we discovered, and rediscovered, is that leadership is not the private reserve of a few charismatic men and women. It is a process ordinary people use when they are bringing forth the best from themselves and others. Whether you are in the private or public sector, whether you are an employee or a volunteer, whether you are front line or senior echelon, whether you are a student or a parent, we believe you are capable of developing yourself as a leader far more than tradition has ever assumed possible. Liberate the leader in everyone and extraordinary things happen.

If there is one singular lesson about leadership from all the cases we have gathered it is this: leadership is everyone's business.

What are the Implications for OD Practitioners?

When you think about it, aren't we all about liberating the leader in everyone? Aren't we about reaching inside the organization and releasing the capacity of everyone to excel? We must enable our clients to broaden their concept of leadership to include those on the front-lines as well as those in the executive suites. When everyone is a leader–when everyone challenges, inspires, enables, models, and encourages–commitment is far greater and success is more likely.

In Conclusion

In our classes and workshops we regularly ask people to share a story about a leader they admire and whose direction they would willingly follow. From this exercise we hope they will discover for themselves what it takes to have an influence on others. We have another objective as well: we want them to discover the power that lies within each one of us to make a difference.

Virtually everyone we have asked has been able to name at least one leader whose compelling impact they have felt. Sometimes it is a well-known figure out of the past who has changed the course of history. Sometimes it is a contemporary role model who serves as an example of success. And sometimes it is a person who has personally helped them learn–a parent, friend, member of the clergy, coach, teacher, manager.

Veronica Guerrero made us realize just how extraordinary those around us can be. Guerrero selected her father, Jose Luis Guerrero, as the leader she admired. Guerrero told the story of her father's leadership in the Union Nacional Sinarquista (UNS) back in the early 1940's. She related, in detail, what her father did and summed it up with this observation from Jose Luis: "I think the work that I did back then helped me extend myself and others to levels that I didn't know I could reach... If you feel strongly about anything, and it is something that will ultimately benefit your community and your country, do not hold back. Fear of failing or fear of what might happen does not help anyone... do not let anyone or anything push you back."

Veronica Guerrero closed her description of her father (who was then dying of pancreatic cancer) with this observation: "As I heard his story and I saw a sick, tired, and weak man I could not help thinking that our strength as humans and as leaders has nothing to do with what we look like. Rather, it has everything to do with what we feel, what we think of ourselves. . . Leadership is applicable to all facets of life." That is precisely the point. If we are to become leaders, we must believe that we, too, can be a positive force in the world. It does have everything to do with what we think of ourselves. ■

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Leadership and the Learning Organization

Charles F. Kiefer

When I was asked to write this article, the first thing that crossed my mind was: Gosh! The world sure doesn't need another article on leadership. As a student of the subject for the past 20 years and a creator of a renowned seminar on leadership for senior executives, my files were full of articles on the subject. In one issue of one of the better magazines I receive, I counted more than 20 prescriptions for leadership in only the first few pages. In those pages I was instructed to:

- Build a new relationship with subordinates
- Become a "servant leader"
- Level with people about problems, changes, hopes, fears, and prospects
- Hold informal gab sessions
- Search for each follower's consuming interest, dream, or vision
- Treat leadership as a profession
- Rate myself and others objectively
- Initiate change
- Manage people's expectations
- Be a good teacher
- Reward accomplishment
- Put people first
- Do what I say

In the remaining pages of that magazine there may have been 150 or more prescriptions for leadership, and they were all good suggestions.

In reviewing the field, it's clear to me that the business community today is more sensitive to the subject of leadership than we were 20 years ago. It is also clear that the dramatic increase in writing on the subject has not produced a corresponding increase in leaders or made existing leaders much more effective. Why?

I think our basic notion of leadership is flawed in some serious ways.

First, we think that leadership is something that is *done*. To be sure, leaders do things. But what makes them leaders is not *what they do* nearly as much as *who they are*.

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Second, we view leadership as an individual phenomenon. We study the great leaders as individuals. From these studies we believe we glean an understanding about what made them great. In so doing, we completely ignore the intimate and reciprocal relationship between leader and follower.

Third, we assume that there is one kind of leadership, one universal set of principles to be discovered that governs all leadership in all cases. Instead, there are many types of leadership, all valid.

If my first and third observations are correct, then the act of reading this article won't make you any more a leader than you already are. At best, it may contribute to your thinking about what leadership means to you. But the good news is that the great leaders I have admired don't show much evidence of worrying about whether they are leaders or not. The same is true for the 5,000+ executives that have participated in our seminars over the past 15 years.

In viewing leadership as an individual phenomenon, we completely ignore the intimate and reciprocal relationship between leader and follower.

In my experience, the real leaders in the world don't spend much time studying what makes for good leadership. Instead, they focus directly on excelling at their chosen games and at those things that will raise their level of play in those games. In this they are like world-class professionals in any field: sports, performing arts, or whatever. The artist or athlete that leads his or her field has an entirely different relationship with the art or the sport than does the newspaper reviewer or sports commentator. The leader is consumed with his or her profession: the commentator or reviewer sits on the sidelines describing that profession. (Of course, the latter may be leaders in their own right, among other commentators and reviewers.)

Leadership as a State of Being

Leaders stand for something. They have created or found something in life that truly matters to them–something that they naturally take a stand for. We have been led to think that leadership is some sort of set of behaviors that we can acquire, some set of skills that can be taught. We have learned how to budget, how to give a good performance review, how to give a good presentation, etc. Now it's time in our career, we're told, to become a leader. We head down the hall to our local personnel officer and ask for the best course on leadership he or she has to offer. But herein lies a big trap. We buy into the notion that leadership is something outside ourselves that can be acquired, and so we begin to seek outside ourselves, which is exactly the wrong place! While there are skills of leadership, those skills don't *make* a leader.

Moreover, you don't become a leader by being given an organizational assignment: assume leadership. *Leadership arises from a commitment to achieving a result that truly matters to you.* If your vision requires the help and support of others, then in all likelihood you will be seen as a leader. My working definition of leadership is simply this: Leadership is what the rest of us call it when we see someone doing something they love and we want to help. This principle can be difficult for those of us in modern organizations, because we have never been expected to care deeply about what we're doing. In fact, historically, emotional involvement in work was discouraged and sanctioned against. Nevertheless, I believe it to be the truest statement that I can make on the subject. We must learn how to bring our hearts to our daily work.

One of my most recent illustrations of leadership is an executive I know who was invited to a black-tie dinner in another city. Instead of taking her husband as escort, she took her 11-year-old son. I can only begin to describe how this simple act affected senior executives in a client firm with whom she was in the early stages of establishing a relationship. They were deeply moved with admiration and respect. In the words of one: "Her choice spoke volumes about who she was as a person and the organization that would promote her to a senior position." I think I can safely say that behavior would never be found in the most thorough survey of prescriptions for leadership. True leadership comes from who the person is–from his or her character.

Leadership as Relationship

The relationship between leader and follower is intimate. To study the leader in isolation is misleading. Leaders make leaders, followers make leaders, the times make leaders. All are important. As Robert Frost puts it, "How hard it is to keep from being King when it's in you and in the situation."

The prevailing view in North America is that the individual makes himself or herself a leader. I think it's more accurate to say that leadership happens when someone takes a stand in favor of a desired future that other people also desire, either actively or latently. While the act of taking this stand is resolute, essentially individual, and often quite solitary, leadership also has a collective and adaptive quality in that it provokes people to project their hopes and aspirations into a changing reality. In other words, leadership arises when a person has the vision to see beyond present circumstances to a more desirable future, and other people are drawn into relationships with that person and his or her vision.

And leaders care not only about their vision, but about all the other people who support and follow it. From that caring, a true relationship and bond is formed. And from the relationship emerges a conversation.

Leadership as a Conversation

If leadership is not primarily a set of skills and behaviors, what is it? How about this: leadership is a conversation about truly important things between people who come to care about those things. As my colleague Eliot Daley says: Leaders give people permission to "care out loud." We study what great leaders said, because what they said is important and the fact that they said something is important. But what their followers said in return is equally important. And so is what those followers said to each other in response to the leader's statements. Perhaps the most important conversation is the one that is subsequently stimulated among followers when the leader is not there at all (although the subsequent discussion may still have been framed by him or her). Said another way, the challenge and work of leadership is to engage people in conversations that they want to have about what matters to them, thus enabling them to evoke, affirm, and align their caring.

The conversation within such an action-oriented community focuses on questions such as these: What do we most care about and want in our lives–what possibilities do our lives hold? Where do we stand right now–can we be both curious and honest about it? What is the work needed to get from here to there? What is our individual level of commitment to accomplishing the work? What are we each called upon to do? What is it going to be like for us along the way?

To be sure, the answers to these questions are important, but even more important is that the questions keep getting asked. This is one of those times when the most valuable thing is a really good question.

These questions are not just feel-good chatter. The essential nature of the conversation is that it develops individual and collective commitment. People are provoked to take their own stand in favor of what they care about. Their individual desires and commitment are fleshed out and witnessed by the community. People discover what they are going to do to actualize their personal visions.

Leaders in a learning organization must be deeply involved in designing systems and structures that promote the easy and efficient translation of human creative energy into collective results.

Leadership in a Learning Organization

In Chapter 18 of *The Fifth Discipline* (1990), my colleague Peter Senge writes of "The Leader's New Work" and speaks about the "Leader as Designer." He points out that often the most neglected aspect of leadership is design. What good is it to inspire and align people's deepest creative energy, only to place them in organizational settings that have them working at cross purposes? Leaders in a learning organization must be deeply involved in designing systems and structures that promote the easy and efficient translation of human creative energy into collective results. Beyond this, if you are to lead a learning organization (or team), you must see to it that there are conscious and deliberate efforts to build both the obvious and the subtle infrastructures that promote the development, retention, and sharing of knowledge capital.

That same chapter also looks at the "Leader as Steward and Teacher." Here our metaphor of conversation is particularly useful. A conversation that develops collective intelligence and creativity is important to every organization to some degree. It is especially important to a "Learning Organization."

This metaphor of leadership as a conversation provides an interesting window from which to view leadership in a learning organization. Simply put, it is part of the leader's job to structure and conduct an ongoing dialogue that raises the organization's collective intelligence, commitment, and creativity. These qualities are central differentiators of the fully mature learning organization. In this setting the questions mentioned earlier become exceedingly important. Conversations about what we most care about, where we are now, and what work we need to do to get from here to there generate a real collective commitment within an organization and establish the creative tension that enables breakthrough creativity (Fritz, 1989).

Leadership is a creative art: it evokes collective human creativity to bring into existence something that was not there before.

In addition to these questions, dialogue in a learning organization focuses on the nature of the organization's collective thinking, because this arena generally offers the highest leverage in developing collective intelligence. The data that we observe, whether personally or organizationally, is selected, filtered, and interpreted through our assumptions and beliefs. To a great degree we see what we believe and are unable to perceive data that lies outside our existing mental models. Our current way of thinking, whether it be personal or collective, governs our perception of reality and thus holds great influence in our ability to create what we desire.

So, what kind of conversation would it take to cause us to think more clearly and more accurately? Unfortunately, thinking about thinking is particularly difficult, rather like the eye trying to see itself. And if that weren't enough, it's also threatening for people to expose their thinking, whether to themselves or others, because often we discover that it is flawed. This is embarrassing enough, but it is compounded when people's identities are wrapped up in their perceptions of how intelligent they are. So, the territory for the conversation is both treacherous and tender. Nevertheless, it's a conversation that must be joined.

Once again, the path is through questions–primarily two. The first has to do with getting to the actual observed data. This question is some form of, "What do we actually observe in reality?" The question has clearly been employed historically by managers, but rarely answered with real rigor and honesty. In most every case, instead of getting observed facts, what we end up discussing are our interpretations of our observations and our conclusions, rather than the observations themselves. These conclusions are almost always functions of our embedded mental models and assumptions more than they are of objective reality. What passes for a conversation in most organizations is not a conversation about facts, but a conversation about competing interpretations of the facts masquerading as a conversation about facts. So, here it is the job of a leader to encourage people to make the distinction between their observations and their interpretations of their observations.

The second question flows naturally from this, "What is the thinking that led you to the conclusions or interpretations you have made?" The intent of this question is to elucidate the underlying thought process and mental models between the conversants, because exploring this substratum creates new intelligence. Of course, this is a particularly difficult question to ask in a helpful and constructive way, because it is all too easily seen as a threat and a setup (which in many cases it actually is). Here the leader must ask the question sincerely and be aware of his or her own motives. Do you really want to explore competing points of view with the intent of developing new awareness or intelligence? This is the central stance that the leader must take and maintain in this conversation–a stance that gently yet resolutely builds a spirit of sincere curiosity and forms the basis for a true learning process, whether it be personal or organizational. This stance, when embedded throughout an organization results in the development and enhancement of individual and collective intelligence.

Many Models of Leadership

I've been surprised, in the last few discussions I've had on leadership, by the strength of opinions people hold on the subject. Leadership is one of those subjects for which some people really want the one, right, and final insight or answer. Interestingly, however, many of the positions that seem to make sense in isolation are irreconcilable with other points of view that also appear honest and accurate. So my conclusion is that no one point of view can be universally right or wrong. Many different models of leadership can be right. Leadership differs in fundamental ways depending on the circumstances, the leader, and the followers. We may abandon the premise that there is some "grand unifying theory" of leadership. Continue the search, yes, but not with the dogmatic attitude that we are going to find the one, ultimate truth about the matter.

The observation that there is no one right way can be unsettling to a person who is trying to become a leader by following a set of instructions. But you don't become a leader this way. Instead, leadership is a creative act: it evokes collective human creativity to bring into existence something that was not there before. As Robert Fritz (1991) has observed, the fundamental nature of problem solving is to drive something (the problem) out of existence. The fundamental nature of creating is to bring something that is desired into existence. In the course of this creative activity, everyone associated develops the ability to create what matters most. Collective confidence builds, as does momentum. The organization or community begins to believe in itself and in its capacity to create the desired future. And this confidence becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, uplifting spirits and further fueling the community's actions.

Leaders emerge at all levels and in all places in an organization. If the accomplishment of what matters to you requires others' help, you will be a leader. If you don't care deeply about what you are doing at work, then there is a good chance you won't be a leader (although if you're the boss, everyone will pretend you are).

Leadership is a consequence of commitment. You cannot commit your life spirit to something you don't care about. So find what you care about and do it.

References

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