Leadership - Today's Requirements and Tomorrow's Challenges
by Marie J. Kane

This is the final article in a series on leadership based on interviews with leaders. It is a distillation of the essence of the best of those explorations coupled with some new perspectives. Being a good leader is much more about who you are and how you manifest that than about what you know.

Leadership is the art of getting people to accomplish things they never thought they could. Leadership is taking people to places they've never been before. What are the attributes of leaders who can meet your organization's demands for effective, heartfelt, committed leadership?

**Vision** is a compelling, transferable, continuously and clearly communicated dream of what can be that allows you and those you lead to fully grasp the juicy possible future and commit to reaching for it. Your vision carries you forward and provides the focus and motivation to be the leader your organization requires.

**Passion** is an intense emotion about what you love in your business that compels action, provides an unequalled source of energy and enables you to survive setbacks and persevere in the face of challenges and uncertainties. In passion you know yourself to be fully alive and are profoundly grateful for it. Effective, positive leaders are focused by vision and fueled by passion.

**Authenticity** is being genuine, not manipulating, not putting up a facade and not being unreachable. It is being fully present when you are with people and creating opportunities to interact with your people. It is being willing to be vulnerable in being real.

**Integrity** is an internal gyroscope that guides knowing what is right and proper, telling the truth, keeping your word, walking the talk, being true to yourself and your beliefs, and doing what's right even when it is difficult. It is resolving moral and ethical dilemmas based on sound principles of good and doing what is right even if no one else will ever know. People are going to look to you to not only set direction, but to set and communicate parameters as to what is and is not acceptable in getting there. Integrity is its own reason. You begin by leading yourself in the right way and setting an example and only then can you make a difference in leading others.

**Courage** is the ability to make tough decisions and also the ability to expect others to make tough decisions as well as the willingness to take appropriate, calculated risks. To unwaveringly hold a clear vision that illuminates the way for those who follow requires courage in the face of doubt. To passionately embrace your vision and values and unflinchingly hold to them, enthusiastically and publicly requires courage. To be authentic requires a special courage for leaders, because being real often means being
vulnerable. To live in integrity, holding to what is right and speaking the truth, even in the face of risk or opposition, requires courage. Nothing is more potent than a clear role model coupled with the coaching and encouragement (literally "to provide with courage") to do likewise. Courage provides the foundation for all the other traits of enlightened, effective leaders.

**Wisdom** is a deep understanding and keen discernment that allows insight into yourself and others. A wise leader is judicious, prudent, sensible and sane. A capacity for sound judgment provides a foundation that enables you to choose sound ends and appropriate means. Common sense, gut feelings and learning from mistakes are all part of wisdom. Wisdom includes the ability to seek out and determine the truth in things and make decisions based on that determination of truth. A wise leader sees the truth regardless of how it plays out against what he or she hoped it would be. A wise leader can separate fact from fiction regardless of his or her own closely held belief systems that shape the way he or she sees things. A wise leader can look at things, clear out the fog and base decisions and actions on truth.

**Communication Skills** include the ability to communicate facts and feelings, vision and passion, in such a way that all can understand and act upon it. It includes having an awareness of all the ways in which you communicate, both verbal and non-verbal, coupled with the realization that you are communicating in some way every minute that you are in public. Really great leaders listen and hear everything.

Other important attributes of leaders are a sense of humor to include not taking oneself too seriously, self-confidence, faith, open-mindedness, a strong work ethic and a willingness to share the glory in success and accept the responsibility in failure.

Honing yourself as a leader and developing new leaders is a key leadership responsibility. This requires focused attention and resources as well as conscious commitment. The leaders interviewed had many thoughtful recommendations on this issue.

**Leaders' Recommendations for Leadership Development**

- Commit to life-long learning.
- Practice leadership skills by doing volunteer work that helps to develop those skills.
- Find role models and mentors and learn from them.
- Volunteer for assignments at work that require leadership and stretching yourself.
- Get a top-notch education, both formal and informal.
- Be a lifelong reader. Read for information, education and inspiration, not just entertainment.
- Read about great leaders including biographies and case studies. History and literature and philosophy are the building blocks of greatness because it gives you an appreciation of the past, a sweep of the present, and your own peculiar insights into the future. You must have a worldview to be a great leader.
- Get a coach.
Always be ready to push the envelope. Push your boundaries for yourself in what you can become. Be willing to learn and grow every day. Be yourself, but be the best self you can be.

Know what you do best, know your attributes and build on them. Despite what goes on positively or negatively that could impact your performance be able to find that quiet spot within you that lets you perform at peak performance under high pressure.

Accept that no one is perfect and give yourself permission not to be perfect, but to always strive for excellence.

There are grand scale challenges for companies as leaders. Key ones include:

Education - Taking the lead in doing something about our education system in this country. This has implications not only for the quality of the available work force, both present and future, but it obviously has major social implications as well. We have to teach a whole new generation how to learn. It has to be done massively with a tremendous amount of money involved and one of the few organizations who are capable of doing it are corporations.

Meaning - The nature of man is to seek meaning. Given the hours that people spend at work, that's one significant place they look for meaning. Often corporations and their objectives don't provide that meaning. Sell widgets? Who wants to sell widgets? Where is my satisfaction, my soul satisfaction? Give me an issue. Don't give me a widget.

Balance versus Excess - We must find a way to maintain the freedom and advantages of capitalism, while controlling the excesses that have created so much havoc.

Corporate Citizenship - Corporations have to become, in a much more serious way, good corporate citizens because their power is immense. Historically being a good corporate citizen has meant handing out money. But there is too much at stake for them to stay out of the game.

All of us create opportunities to be a leader, even if in a small way. We make a difference in our families, communities, companies and country, but only if we step up to the plate and take a swing. Whether we are affecting the course of the world political scene or shaping the character of one child or one new leader, we make a contribution, but only when we see beyond our own individual needs and our own front yard. Growing as a leader means growing as a human being. That is the number one job for all of us.

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