

Do We Need a New Leadership Model?

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As a practicing management consultant and executive over the last thirty years this topic continues to intrigue me. Perhaps the timing as we approach a presidential election with three candidates possessing very different styles is particularly important.

I think most of us have mused with several questions over the course of our careers about this elusive topic of “leadership” Questions like-

- Is leadership different than management?
- What does effective leadership look like?
- Is leadership born or taught?
- Am I an effective leader?

I ran across a couple of quotes from Marcus Buckingham, author of from Good to Great and Now Discover Your Strengths recently that particularly intrigued me.

In his book, The One Thing You Need To Know...About Great Managing, Great Leading, and Sustained Individual Success, he states:

“Effective leaders don’t have to be passionate. They don’t have to be charming. They don’t have to be brilliant...They don’t have to be great speakers. What they must be is clear.

Above all else, they must never forget the truth that of all the human universals...our need for clarity is the most likely to engender in us confidence, persistence, resilience, and creativity”

How interesting...Clarity as the key. He goes on to say in this same book that

“ Today’s most respected and successful leaders are able to transform fear of the unknown into clear visions of whom to serve, core strengths to leverage and actions to take. They enable us to pierce the veil of complexity and identify the single best vantage point from which to examine our complex roles. Only then can we take clear, decisive action.”

It probably is easy to take the next step and say that I firmly agree with Buckingham. In fact I have spent my career helping organizations embrace a structure to support this model that I call moving from Compliance to Commitment.

Compliance at its most basic is a very simple employment model. Leadership controls all the rewards and the sanctions and therefore we proscribe acceptable behavior and performance and reward or punish accordingly. We can probably all remember the old joke about the rules of management-

Rule Number 1- The boss is always right!

Rule Number 2- If the boss is wrong see rule 1!

We laugh, but I can tell you I still experience organizations that subtly or not so subtly reinforce that philosophy.

Managing from Commitment is the opposite of that particular paradigm. It requires creating clarity of vision and a connection for employees that causes them to embrace the organizations goals because they see their own personal goals and philosophies reflected there.

Roger Deprey created his own modification of Maslow's hierarchy in an employment context through his Human Resources Pyramid. He states that every employee at every level asks six questions in a very specific ascending order:

- What is my job?
- How am I doing?
- Does anyone care?
- What do we do?
- How are we doing?
- How can I help?

Deprey said back in the early 80's when he first created this model that he believed that less than ten percent of the worlds corporations had the majority of their employees focused on that last question- a state he referred to as "organizational self actualization". I'm not sure our scores have gone up.

His reasoning is that most organizations focus their strategic planning and organizational development activities at the last three questions. We focus on our mission and vision statements or our brand, but we fail to connect it for our employees at a personal level

Ken Matejka, in his book Why This Horse Won't Drink, defined commitment this way:

"Commitment is the act of being physically, psychologically, and emotionally impelled. It means that employees gladly give up other options."

Wow, talk about organizational self actualization! Think about creating an environment for your organization where your employees are physically, psychologically, and emotionally impelled to support the goals and objectives of your company because they have made the connection between their goals and vision and yours, that's organizational self actualization!

In every organization I have worked with as either a consultant or an executive that is the goal I have proposed to management- paraphrasing Matejka we have even created a roadmap to achieve this "miracle" through implementing a structure containing five key strategies:

- Respect
- Responsibility
- Information

- Rewards
- Loyalty

So far we have seen this model implemented successfully from organizations ranging from behavioral research and healthcare to high technology to financial services and manufacturing. Interestingly enough it also crosses generational and cultural boundaries.

At its root it relies on the clarity that Buckingham states as the most effective tool in the leadership arsenal- not charisma, not intellect, not experience, but clarity.

So in summary I would like to leave you with some key thoughts:

- We do indeed need a new leadership model that relies on Commitment rather than compliance, and stresses clarity and alignment between organizational and individual goals.
- There is a “new role” for management at every level to make this happen.

I borrow from Richard Rumelt , from the article [Strategy’s strategist: An interview with Richard Rumelt](#), Harvard Business Review to define those roles;

“The most important role of any **manager** is to breakdown a situation into challenges a subordinate can handle. In essence, the manager absorbs a great deal of the ambiguity in the situation and gives much less ambiguous problems to others....In a highly focused organization, the **CEO** does this for the entire organization by examining the overall competitive environment and providing enough guidance to let the organization get to work. The CEO defines the business problems for everyone else.”

Sounds like creating clarity to me.

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