

The True Qualities of a Successful Leader

“In times of change, learners inherit the earth, while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists.”

-Eric Hoffer

This quote by Eric Hoffer, an American philosopher, really speaks true to the times that we are living in today. A leader's ability to adapt to the changes in the environment around him/her is really the key to success, and a recession can be the true test of these abilities. When times are good it is very difficult to judge a person's true character, because it can be so easy to be successful when everything is going the way it is planned. With times the way they are now, it is an opportune time for employers to evaluate and really figure out who the true leaders are within their organization.

What are the qualities that make a person a good leader? Is it the fact that this person is very relaxed and gives their employees a lot of room to be innovative and creative, or is it because this person keeps their employees stuck on a rigid schedule? The truth behind it is that a real productive leader will be all of these things in one single person. For somebody to really provide good direction for the rest of the company, they need to balance the times when the company needs strict direction, and when the company needs time to be innovative. A book called “Primal Leadership” by Daniel Goleman, describes six different leadership styles that will push a company past success and into the Business Hall of Fame. The most effective leaders can actually use each style at the most opportune time, in order to bring success to his/her company.

Visionary. This is the type of person who encourages everybody in the company to be creative and think outside of the box. He/she has many ideas of what direction the company should move towards, but no plan of actually how to get there. This will encourage other employees to take responsibility for the company and its plan for the future, as well as encouraging them to experiment and take calculated risks. A management style like this flourishes when the company is looking for a new direction to head in and the company needs inspiration from someone who has ideas, without any boundaries.

Coaching: A management style like this can be very useful for developing certain qualities in employees, if it is used in the right situation. This person likes to have one-on-one time with individual employees, while using this time to develop the employee, help improve the skills of that employee, and also help to create a bond between the goals of the company and the goals of that individual employee. This can be a very productive method of management if there is somebody on the staff who specifically seems to be open to guidance. It is important not to use this method to walk an employee through every step of a process and feed the employee information that he/she might already understand. This will make the recipient of this information feel as though the company does not have confidence in him/her.

Affiliative: This management style uses an emphasis on maintaining team harmony as a way to promote cohesiveness in the work environment. Managers with an emphasis on keeping the peace are perfect during a time in which a dispute might have taken place and lines of communication have broken down within the department or company. The only problem with having a department that is too “buddy, buddy” is that it may suffer from a disease known as groupthink. This occurs when everybody in the group begins to immediately agree with their peers without question, and it can lead to mediocre performance.

Democratic: A manager with this style is constantly looking to include every employee in the decision making process. This person always wants the process to be fair and equal, which can be a huge morale booster for a company or department. When every employee feels like they are involved in the process, of making an important decision, they are more likely to treat that opportunity as if the livelihood of the company is resting solely on their shoulders. The inclusion of everybody’s opinion can be a key to success for companies during uncertain times, but it can also lead to extended periods of time where problems can go unsolved due to the fact that people may be unable to decide on a specific solution.

Pacesetting: This person is obsessed with continuously trying to be more efficient in the work place. Everything needs to be completed at a higher standard and at a quicker pace. This can be the key to motivating certain individuals who tend to do good work, but generally at a slower pace than the average person. Other than using this method for the occasional motivational day, it tends to wear down an individual’s self of steam. Employees who are constantly under pressure to perform better tend to feel inadequate, and this can have a real negative effect on their ability to work.

Commanding: This style of management is used by the hard-nosed manager who needs everything done his/her way, with no exceptions. The authoritarian method tends to focus on negative feedback when mistakes are made, instead of positive reinforcement when the job is done well. This can really have a negative effect on morale in the office, and can actually lead to resentment of the manager. As a result, this method should be used only when the company is in a time of crisis and needs strict guidance and direction.

A truly successful leader will not be a blend of all of these different styles of management, but instead have the ability to switch between these different leadership methods. Although, having all of these different methods, in your quiver of leadership styles, will give you a distinct advantage over the competition, it is not the key. It is also essential that the individual who is in the leadership role knows when to pull one of these styles out of his/her quiver. If an individual has the ability to switch between different styles of management, but is not quite sure when to use each style, their abilities are going to be ineffective at motivating employees.

In order to become an effective leader by putting this advice to use, it is important for you to go back, think about, and analyze different situations that occurred in the past. Take this

information and think about how these different leadership styles could have been used effectively to improve different business situations in the past. Although, the past is not a direct implication of the future, having planned past events will help get you into the mindset of using these methods and will allow you to deal with similar situations in the future.