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The Death of Leadership in Management

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The Death of Leadership in Management

GSLC Gold Certification

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1 Introduction 3

2 Personnel Management.....6

3. Do you have what it takes.....8

4. Leadership Traits..... 12

5. Know Yourself..... 18

6. Know Your People.....19

7. Other Points to Ponder.....20

8. Summary 24

9. References 25

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1 Introduction

The intention of this paper is to outline the author's views on leadership techniques when it comes to the management of personnel. It will also describe the differences one faces between managing personnel and managing processes to include what qualities one should possess for each. Some possible misconceptions are also addressed concerning the meaning of "management" and "leadership" and how these two processes greatly differ.

Management and leadership are two entirely different subjects in today's corporate America. Although many people confuse the two and often act as if they are the same topic, management and leadership are not synonymous. However, a truly gifted manager is not only a manager but also a leader. It is the leadership component that the best managers have and the mediocre managers strive for and do not know how to attain.

A search for the meaning or definition of a manager or leader will reveal so very many different views on what makes a good leader. It will often depend on the opinion of the author of the definition or possibly the particular circumstances the leader is faced with. It may be possible that the wide variety of views on leadership are based on the fact that there are so many different aspects or traits to consider. One simple definition could not possibly encompass all the traits of a good leader. Management is, according to Merriam-Webster, “the act or art of managing: the conducting or supervising of something.” Leadership is defined as “the act or an instance of leading” and a leader is “a person who has commanding authority or influence”(Merriam-Webster, 2007). The difference is that a manager supervises some activities and as a result some individuals, meanwhile a leader influences individuals and earns their loyalty so that the individuals willingly follow their lead. A manager is not always willingly followed.

Today's manager is generally someone who is selected or appointed. Many times whether the person has the ability to lead or not is irrelevant. The selection is, in most cases,

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based on seniority and politics. Many managers are selected based on superior technical ability, which is a plus in understanding the job but does not assist the manager in understanding the individuals s/he supervises. A true leader (and therefore a good manager) is one who has the inherent ability to influence people, based on genuine respect that has been earned (not demanded) and as a result of that respect, encourages and enables the team to "get the job done".

This emphasis on leadership is an entirely different approach to management than what has become the norm in most companies. The only place this author has seen most of these techniques instilled into management and routinely practicedis in the United States Navy's (USN) Chief Petty Officer (CPO) community. Although very simple and real practices, these ideals seem to fall by the way side in most approaches to management and/or leadership. A prime example of this: The Navy CPO considers it his/her primary responsibility to "take care of his/her people" because "If you take care of your people, they will take care of you"(CPO Pearls of Wisdom, 2007). This is very rarely a practice that is taught or written about in any management curriculum or book on leadership. The reason for this oversight may be because these principles are so very simple that they are overlooked. In most cases, these principles may be considered "Common Sense". Unfortunately Common Sense does not seem to be prevalent in Corporate America these days. It may be time to re-iterate.

> "*A boss creates fear, a leader confidence. A boss fixes blame, a leader corrects mistakes. A boss knows all, a leader asks questions. A boss makes work drudgery, a leader makes it interesting. A boss is interested in himself or herself, a leader is interested in the group.*" (Ewing, 1976)

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2 Personnel Management

In this section, the process of personnel management versus process or project management will be discusses. The differences between process/project management are quite revealing. Many times, someone who may flourish in project management, may not do so well when managing people.

The management of personnel is a lot more involved and takes more experience, effort and skill than the management of processes or projects. Process management is a very simple task compared to personnel management because personnel management requires the manager to be knowledgeable in related fields such as psychology, organizational culture, and motivational techniques to name a few. Some managers intuitively understand these fields and know how to relate to people; others do not. It takes a special breed of person to have what it takes to properly manage personnel.

This author has had the privilege of serving as a manager of large and small divisions responsible for a wide variety of tasks throughout the world for most of the author's career, both military and civilian. Looking back some of the best lessons were from managers who were not effective, and the examples they showed regarding what techniques NOT to use.

Another component of this discussion is whether or not someone can be taught how to be a good manager (i.e., a leader). Leadership is a talent; it's a gift that's given. Many of the skills of a leader can be taught but the question is why someone who has been taught all the skills of leadership can still be a poor manager. The answer may be that some innate ability is required (Zig Ziglar, 2007).

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3 Do you have what it takes?

It is very important to know what it takes to be a good manager. It's important for the manager to know this as well as the person or team that is selecting a candidate for a management position. Although the traits of a leader are often timesargued, there are key characteristics that an individual must have in order to effectively manage a team.

Many heroes from history were known as excellent “leaders.” Some were legitimately good leaders but many more were good military strategists; not necessarily good with the troops they led. The confusion here is the same as modern-day, the difference between a leader and a manager.

Many that were considered great “leaders” weren't really good people; they weren’t really leaders at all. They managed the process of war and the equipment, they designed the campaigns. If their accomplishments were scrutinized, the true leaders, the ones that really made the difference, were invisible or unknown to the majority. These were the lower-grade military officers and enlisted personnel who actually managed the troops that fought. It was the individuals in these lower positions that inspired loyalty and encouraged feats of bravery from the individuals under their supervision.

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I will illustrate by telling a fictitious story that depicts how most combat situations, and the results thereof, seem to make it to the press and history books. Who was the leader in this scenario that had the genuine respect of those who actually got the job done: "Captain Blah led his platoon directly into enemy fire. His platoon was outnumbered 10 to 1. After 13 hours of fierce fighting, Captain Blah lead his troops to victory and captured the fort only losing one member of his platoon" - In reality, it was "Gunnery Sergeant Hero" who made the calls and lead the platoon to victory. Fighting harder than anyone else. Leading by example. The gunny had a bond with the troops and truly cared about them. He or she also had the experience. The Gunny was the real leader but his name is never mentioned. The Captain, on the other hand (in general), only cares about making Major. A victory for him could win him that promotion. I would venture to say that the platoon members were looking to the Gunny for leadership decisions.

Most people who think of a leader have a totally different concept than what is explained here. Many people envision a leader as someone who is "strong" or someone who is "smart;" maybe even someone who is well organized. While all of these characteristics would definitely make an individual a much better manager they don't make an individual a good leader.

For instance, if an individual is in a management position who is not first a good person (i.e., who cares about people and about getting the job done) then being "strong" could quite possibly make this person a worse manager than another manager who is a good person but not as strong. To illustrate: Think of a manager that has the "strong" character trait but is not a good person. This manager doesn't care about the people he is managing. This person cares much more about his or herself and how they are perceived by higher management. They care about getting the job done but usually only if it is high visibility and will benefit him or her. Sometimes it's not even important if the job is done right as long as it appears right and they, as the manager,look good. These types of managers use this "strong" character trait to intimidate people to achieve results, just to make themselves look good.

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These managersusually accept all of the credit for themselves and never pass it on to the rest of his or her team.

Another example is someone who is selected for a management position because they are "smart" (or they have a degree or a certification for instance). Many people who are "smart" don't necessarily make good employees let alone good leaders. Unfortunately, there are many people that use their "credentials" to get out of work. Intelligence in a leader is only good if it's used to benefit the team and put to work for the betterment of the organization for which the person is a leader. Intelligence in leadership is oftentimes self-serving. This same analogy can be applied to nearly every other trait of a manager or leader. It leads us back to the pre-requisite of being a good, caring person.

Unfortunately, many people are assigned management positions for reasons other than those that would indicate they would be a good leader. Sometimes these individuals achieve the results the organization desires. Many times these managers do effectively get the job done through fear or manipulation or whatever technique works for them. Unfortunately that does not promote a healthy working environment and is nearly always short-lived. Some organizations promote this type of leadership for big projects, which must be completed accurately, and within a short timeframe (alive or die situation) however, this shouldn't be the normal leadership approach. With this type of management style you are almost sure to lose your most valuable assets (employees and their historical knowledge of the organization). In addition, the manager who uses this type of leadership (intimidation and pressure-techniques) will quickly lose respect of his or her employees, peers and eventually higher-level managers.

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4 Leadership Traits

The traits of a leader have been and can be argued. Many times it depends on the situation. Therefore, one set of leadership traits for all management functions would be very difficult to articulate. For example, the traits that a leader of a combat unit would require may very well be different from those of a leader of a medical team or business unit. First and foremost, probably one of the most important leadership traits, and coincidentally one which is not seen in any management book, a manager must be a genuinely good person. They have to care, not only about the mission or the company but also about the individuals on the team. Below is an attempt to surmise the leadership traits that should be common in all leadership positions.

Set the Example: After being a good person, "Leadership by Example" is the most important trait of a leader. It is unreasonable for leaders to expect anyone who is under their leadership to do something they would not do themselvesor vice versa. If a manager expects someone to stay late for a project, that manager should be willing to stay late (not that the manager will have the opportunity to stay late every time but it should be well known to the manager's staff that he/she has no problem doing so based on the manager'sactions and history).

Of note, anyone in a leadership position isleading by example. Employees, both peers and subordinates arewatching your every step. Managers both provide and foster bad practices or good ones; most of the time, employeesmimic what leadership has taught them through example. This could be a very good thing or could spin out of control depending on the example provided by the manager.

In keeping with this philosophy, a good manager/leader needs to be tough on his or herself. They need to hold themselves to a higher standard and watch carefully everything they do or say.

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"The real leader has no need to lead-- he is content to point the way." (Miller, 1980)

Integrity: "Steadfast adherence to a strict moral or ethical code." (Navy.mil, 2004). Ethics are talked about, taught and preached quite readily in Corporate America today but rarely are they enforced or adhered to. Ethics are taught because it's a "requirement," however; it does little to no good at all to teach ethics if they arenot readily enforced.

As far as morals are concerned, it is not popular to suggest that someone actually should have moral character in order to be a leader. Nevertheless, the true leader, the leader that enjoys genuine respect, will be one of integrity. He or she will be radiant with moral and ethical character.

The next three defined traits of a leader happen to be the core values of the United States Navy. The author believes in these values and feels they are very important in a leadership role.

Honor: This is one of the three Core Values of the United States Navy. According to Wikipedia, "Honor is the evaluation of a person's trustworthiness and social status based on that individual's espousals and actions. Honor is deemed exactly what determines a person's character: whether or not the person reflects honesty, respect, integrity, or fairness. The Navy's definition of Honor as it pertains to core values is as follows: "***I am accountable for my professional and personal behavior"*** "I will bear true faith and allegiance ...""

> "Accordingly, we will: Conduct ourselves in the highest ethical manner in all relationships with peers, superiors and subordinates; Be honest and truthful in our dealings with each other, and with those outside the Navy; Be willing to make honest recommendations and accept those of junior personnel; Encourage new ideas and deliver the bad news, even when it is unpopular; Abide by an uncompromising code of integrity, taking responsibility for our actions and keeping our word; Fulfill or exceed our legal and ethical responsibilities in our public and personal lives twenty-four hours a day. Illegal or improper behavior or even the appearance of such behavior will not be tolerated. We are accountable for our professional and personal behavior...."

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(Navy.mil, 2007)

Truthfulness: This is so important. All it takes is one lie before a leader is no longer trusted by those theylead. In most cases the manager does not even necessarily have to be caught in a lie. People know or strongly suspect. Some managers, however, have become so good at lying their way through situationsthat they can do it regularly without detection. In time, these lies will be revealed. To be a good liar also requires an incredible memory; the majority of individuals do not have a memory that detailed and are inevitably caught.

Courage: This author personally defines courage as the ability to do the right thing in the face of adversity. Wikipedia describes it as: "Courage, also known as bravery and fortitude, is the ability to confront fear, pain, danger, uncertainty or intimidation. It can be divided into two categories: (1) physical courage (i.e., in face of physical pain, hardship, and threat of death) and (2) moral courage (i.e., in the face of shame, scandal, and discouragement). (Wikipedia.com, 2007)

The best definition comes from the description of the U.S. Navy's Corps Values:

> "I will support and defend ... Accordingly, we will have: courage to meet the demands of our profession and the mission when it is hazardous, demanding, or otherwise difficult; Make decisions in the best interest of the navy and the nation, without regard to personal consequences; Meet these challenges while adhering to a higher standard of personal conduct and decency; Be loyal to our nation, ensuring the resources entrusted to us are used in an honest, careful, and efficient way. Courage is the value that gives us the moral and mental strength to do what is right, even in the face of personal or professional adversity."

(Navy.mil, 2007)

Commitment: Wikipedia defines commitment as

> "an interaction dominated by obligations. These obligations may be mutual, or self-imposed, or explicitly stated, or may not. Distinction is often made between commitment as a member of an organization, such as a sporting team, a religion, or as an employee." (Wikipedia.com, 2007)

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From a management perspective, it is important to be committed to the people the manager is responsible as well as to the mission. To commit to a position of leadership means that the leader is willing to do what it takes to support his/her people in accomplishing the mission/goal of the organization.

The U.S. Navy's perspective on Commitment is:

> "I will obey the orders ... Accordingly, we will: ... Care for the safety, professional, personal and spiritual well-being of our people; Show respect toward all people without regard to race, religion, or gender; Treat each individual with human dignity; Be committed to positive change and constant improvement; Exhibit the highest degree of moral character, technical excellence, quality and competence in what we have been trained to do. The day-to-day duty of every Navy man and woman is to work together as a team to improve the quality of our work, our people and ourselves."
>
> (Navy.mil, 2007)

How could one possibly fail with this outlook? Respect everyone. Treat everyone with human dignity. Exhibit the highest degree of moral character. To work as a team. These are qualities rarely seen these days but they are extremely important.

Honesty: This character trait, although sometimes very hard to comply with, is a must in dealing with everyone. The people individuals work with, the people individuals work for and especially with people who are working for an individual. A lot of times dishonesty is resorted to in order to save face or to keep from hurting someone's feelings. This is not a very good practice because people can usually tell when someone isdishonest. Even if they can't tell, eventually it will be revealed and all will be lost. Managers will quickly lose the respect of their people as well as that of the people theywork with and for. Word spreads quickly on this as well.

Wikipedia defines honesty as "the human quality of communicating and acting truthfully. It is related to truth as a value. This includes listening, and any action in the human repertoire — as well as speaking." (Wikipedia.com, 2007)

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Loyalty: Loyalty is all but dead in America today; especially in Corporate America. There were still traces of loyalty in the military before the authorretired but it was fading there too. It is very important for the leader to be loyal to his or her subordinates, to be loyal to the organization and to be loyal to their leadership. The problem is it really needs to go both ways (up and down the organization) or it will quickly fade. The important thing is, it needs to start with leadership. If it starts there it will foster loyalty throughout the organization be it big or small.

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5 Know Yourself

It is very important for a leader to know him or herself. A leader needs to know their strengths and, more importantly, theirweaknesses. Leaders need to understand what is needed to effectively manage the team as well as the mission they have been assigned to manage. Recognizing weaknesses early will allow the leaderto dedicate the appropriate amount of time to strengthen skills in those areas. In some cases, when weaknesses are recognized, a leader can assign someone from their team to assist in that area while the leader hones his/herskills.

A leader should never consider him/herself to have arrived at perfection. Leaders, peopleare always learning. Always be willing to listen to people when they offer constructive criticism. This criticism can come from anyone, not just those who are peers or seniors. Leaders can learn just as much about themselves from people junior to them as from those who are seniors. This constructive criticism does not always have to be accepted or acted upon but should be considered.

In considering strengths and weaknesses it is important to look at the key components of leadership as noted earlier in the traits of a leader (SANS Management 512 Leadership Essentials for Managers, 2006).

6 Know your people

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As important as it is for a leader to know him/herself, it is even more important for a leader to know his/herpeople. Not just the basics like their name or what town they live in. Really get to know who they are. Getting to know what motivates subordinates allows a leader to assign projects that would best benefit the subordinates'needs as well as those of the organization. Know what type of person they are (Are they fast paced? Are they more concerned with results or with relationships? Are they a perfectionist? Are they an introvert or extrovert?). Knowing what their short term and long term goals are allows a leader to guide their subordinates down the path to achieving their goals while the leader is, at the same time,reaching company goals. Know their strengths and weaknesses. Know their family and what their family situation is. Even know what kind of hobbies and interests they have. Managers don't seem to take the time to get to know their people in this day and age but it is very important.

At the same time a leader is getting to know his/her people, they are getting to know the leader. This fosters a healthy relationship and builds upon the genuine respect a leadershould be striving for. The more a leader builds these relationships, the more successful he/she will be in guiding their people down the road to success and accomplishing the goals of the organization. Again, this has to be real. People will know if it's not.

7 Other Points to Ponder

Take care of your people: A key component of leading people is that it is vital that a leader take care of his/her people. This author has heard time and time again, "Take care of your people and they will take care of you". Numerous examples of why this works exist in the workplace and can be seen everyday. There's a trick though - it's the word "care". A leader has to be genuine in doing this. People know when someone is not genuine. People also know when someone genuinely cares about them and it's so rare these days they will generally go out of their way to take care of that person.

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Recognize your people: This trait seems to have all but died in our society. People just don't seem to understand the importance of this. Recognition is not just giving someone an award or presentation for something. Recognition is alsoabout every day "Atta Boy" type recognition. Very rarely are compliments on a job well done given anymore. A lot of people praisethemselves. Even for accomplishments they didn't even do, usually for accomplishmentsthat the people that worked for them did. That's just wrong. A good manager will never give himself/herself credit for anything, even if they do some or the majority ofthe work. A good manager will constantly recognize the accomplishments of his or her division (platoon, project team, department, company, etc). Not just to the individual achieving the goal but also to everyone around them. Consider how an employee would feel if the VP or CEO or someone of stature in the organization singled them out in a meeting and praised what a great job they did on (that project).

"No man will make a great leader who wants to do it all himself, or to get all the credit for doing it." (Carnegie, 1919)

Listen: Another extremely important aspect of managing people. To reiterate: listening has to depict genuine interest. Standing there silently while someone is talking does not necessarily count as listening. It also means listening to everything, not just what someone wantsto hear. For example, how would an employee feel about their manager if they were telling him/her about their son learning the alphabet at such a young age and how proud they were of him and, right in the middle of theconversation, he/she said "Hey, did you see that race on Saturday"? On the other hand, how would the employee feel if, in the same example, the manager said "That's amazing, I've never heard of a child learning the alphabet that young"? It may sound stupid and maybe even trivial but that manager has just reached a different level of respect from the person he/she is leading. And it didn't even have anything to do with the job. It takes people a while to truly understand this but finally leaders come to realize how important this really is. It's the little things that lead to greatness.

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Defend: Nothing makes an employee feel better than having a manager defend theirposition on something. Most managers these days cower in the face of any adversity. The manager may be convinced, and it may be clearly obvious to anyone with a brain, that the employee isright but he/she is unwilling to even bring it up to the next level of management. This manager would be seen (or thinks he/she would be seen) by upper management as a trouble maker. It takes true courage to do this and a leader may have to work on the tactics but it is something that is sorely missing in management today.

Provide Clear Direction: Yet another problem in corporate America is a lack of clear direction. Most people want to do a good job. Even those people who managers feel will never amount to anything, they alsowant to fit in and be a part of the team. Although these are the hardest people to lead, they can become a vital member of the team if the leader/manager takesthe time to find out what they might be good at, or are maybe already good at (find out what makes them tick, what they have a knack for) and POINT them in that direction. Unfortunately this might result in the leader/manager losing them from their team because what these employees are good at might not fit into theproject plans. The alternative is, however, to leave them where they're at. Unproductive and unhappy and providing no real value to the project. This isn't goodfor anyone. It would bring morale down, make theleader unhappy and doesn't really do the "problem child" any good. Again, a leader has to care and that takes time.

"The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality." (DePree, 1990)

Praise in public, criticize in private: Thismight only be a military saying. No one wants to be chewed out in front of their peers.

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8 Summary

In summary, the management of personnel takes a special person with unique characteristics. The traits of a true leader are vast and change with the situation and personalities involved. The basic truths, however, will always remain the same. A leader should be a good, caring person. S/he will be genuine, have vision and take care of their people. Clarity of direction will be a benchmark of a true leader and they will also be willing to listen to the concerns of their crew. Finally, the greatest leaders will lead by example and be the perfect model to follow.

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