

The “Tremendous Ten” of Leadership



(Leaders) refuse to view their people as “resources,” and instead consider them investors. They are adept at attracting, retaining and maximizing the number and performance of their “winners and believers.”

It was said about one leader, “His people would follow him anywhere—but only out of a sense of morbid curiosity.” Many people lead in the way that a hood ornament “leads” the car—it’s out in front, but it doesn’t do much to steer.

Leadership is the “death valley” for many organizations and careers. What are some common yet dangerous leadership myths?

- People are leaders because they have formal authority, titles, money or power.
- People are leaders because they’re running large businesses (or their own businesses).
- People who are trained as managers can be expected to act as leaders.
- The notion that delivering currently acceptable business results is the same as practicing good leadership.

Working for several decades with leaders who ranged from magnificent to wretched, I have observed some common attributes of great leaders, qualities that don’t appear on typical leadership laundry lists. Truly exceptional leaders:

Know what leadership is. They know the difference between leadership and management. They know that we should lead people and manage things (and lead people in such a way that they will help us manage things). The four “classic” functions of management are planning, organizing, directing and controlling—all great approaches to inanimate objects and projects, but terrible approaches to people. I have yet to meet the project that didn’t need to be controlled, or the person who could be.

Lead from the heart. They know that people are more likely to follow someone who is passionate and smart than someone who is merely smart. While researching my book *The Passionate Organization*, I repeatedly discovered that for outstanding leaders it’s never heart in lieu of head, but always heart in front of head. And rather than impose their own visions, they build shared vision through vigorous dialogue.

Understand the power of commitment. They know the value of mutual commitment. They don’t ask people to make bigger com-

mitments than they are willing to make in return. They lose cheap talk about employee “loyalty” and build two-way pledges.

Are friends of truth and enemies of magical thinking. They push their organizations to face reality and (where possible) change internal and external realities. They don’t make excuses (“As soon as the economy...”), and they don’t wait for saving events (“There’s nothing wrong with us that (blank) wouldn’t fix”).

Leverage the power of paradox. Great leaders understand intuitively that the world is a whole lot more “both/and” than “either/or.” Do they take more risks or eliminate risk? Do they live in the present or live in the future? Do they benchmark competitors or ignore them? Yes, yes, and yes.

Act as designers. They think of themselves as organizational designers rather than tinkering mechanics. They know that if they get the design right, the results will follow.

Free the masses. They create an environment that optimizes the efforts of the 95 percent who would like their work lives to count for something, rather than creating restrictions for the five percent who just don’t care.

Possess a people-first mindset that maximizes talent. They refuse to view their people as “resources,” and instead consider them investors. They are adept at attracting, retaining and maximizing the number and performance of their “winners and believers.”

Share power. They treat power as a tool, not a goal. And they use it to liberate rather than dominate.

Change the talk. They change the nature of the conversation. By the things they discuss, the things they don’t discuss and the questions they ask, they use the power of words to change the way the organization thinks.

There you have them, the “Tremendous Ten” attributes of world-class leadership. Great leaders practice them, average leaders don’t understand them, and poor leaders reject them.

We might use other means to get decent short-term results. They might make us money. But they can’t make us great. ■

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