

WHAT MAKES AN EFFECTIVE LEADER?

By Sattar Bawany

Many bosses find themselves in leadership positions without ever having consciously made the choice to become a leader, let alone a great leader.

The 'Peter Principle', (named after its originator L. Peter) states that in modern organizations, most bosses rise to the level of their least competence, like the specialist (e.g. accountant, engineer, lawyer etc.) who is so good at their craft that they get promoted to a management position in 'charge of people' without having mastered any real leadership skills. And then they bomb. It's not their fault, they were promoted into the position with little or no training or mentoring...it's sink or swim.

Well intentioned promises of leadership development, coaching or mentoring were made to the leader when they were appointed, only to fall by the wayside because more pressing business matters crowded out the hours in the new leader's day.

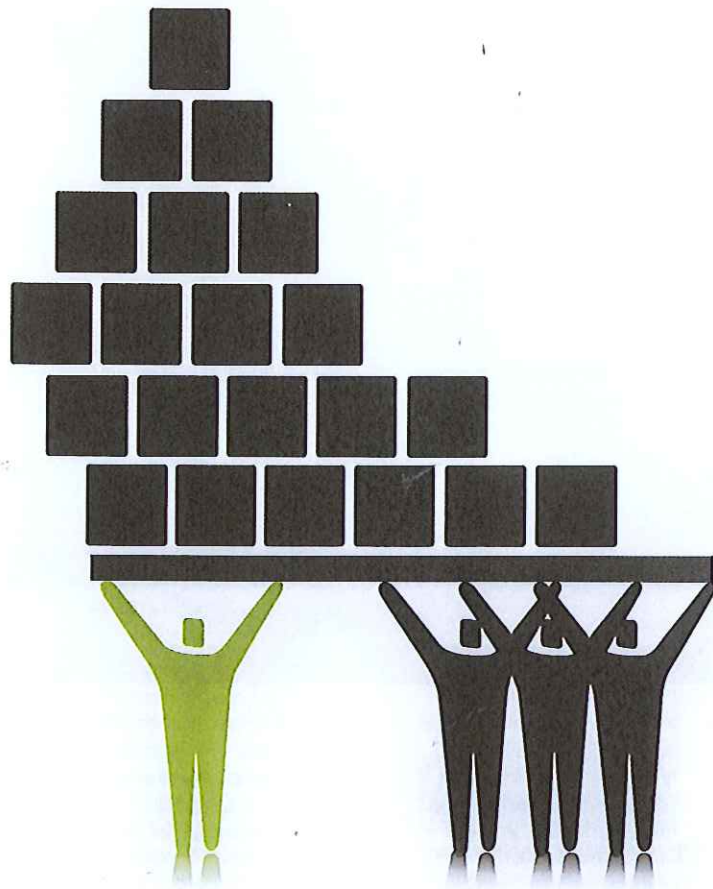
If you are in this position, or you know someone who is, (your boss?) helpful advice is available. Just read on...

Like a captain of a sporting team or a general of an army, leaders need to innovate, inspire, excite or provide a clear vision to others. They hold and believe in a vision and just as importantly, have the self-belief and conviction to communicate it to others. Furthermore leaders do not have definitive characteristics. Some inspire and organise, whereas others are strategic or tactical, spot opportunities or protect against disaster.

Leadership is a journey of discovery. It is the expression of a person at his or her best whose aim is to transform something for the better and to develop this potential in others. It is not a solitary pursuit but one that harnesses the energy of those around you.

A manager can implement processes, monitor performance, set business goals and objectives and generally take care of the day-to-day needs of their staff. However achieving authentic leadership takes more than textbook management skills.

No one can argue that a great leader can boost an organization's growth and



performance in much the same way a poor leader can run one into the ground. But what makes a leader effective or ineffective is a more nebulous concept to pin down.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD LEADER? The leadership qualities that are required to make a good leader can vary in different companies, teams and situations.

According to Jim Kouzes, lecturer and author of seven books on leadership, including the best-seller "The Leadership Challenge," the qualities that make an effective leader have two distinct perspectives: what followers look for and what research from the past few decades has shown. "There are four things consistently that we have found that people most look for in a leader. Number one, people want a leader who's honest, trustworthy and has integrity. Second (they

want someone) forward-looking, who has a vision of the future, foresight and thinks about the long term. Third, people want a leader who is competent, has expertise, knows what they're doing, and fourth is inspiring, dynamic, energetic, optimistic and positive about the future."

This can be illustrated in both art and modern leadership models. For example, the fact that leadership qualities are dependent on context is demonstrated in the film 'Twelve O'Clock High'.

In the film "Twelve O'Clock High", produced in 1949, as a squadron starts to suffer increasing losses during the war, the leader's people-oriented approach starts to fail. He is replaced by a dictatorial bully who turns the squadron round and restores their pride (in modern setting, such leadership behaviour would often be regarded as unacceptable).

LEADERSHIP STYLES

Some people have one style of leadership, which is fine if they can find a situation that requires that style of leadership.

Flexible leadership, however, involves being able to adapt your leadership style according to the situation and the state of the team — e.g. taking charge when a team is forming but playing the role of coach when a team is managing itself well.

Also, the need to change one's leadership style according to the circumstances is one of the fundamental principles underlying popular models such as Situational Leadership (developed by Blanchard and Hersey in the late 1960s). And there are many other examples that go much further back, to biblical times and other periods of recorded history.

PERSPECTIVE Self-awareness is perhaps one of the most difficult leadership skills to learn and yet it is the one that often has the most impact. As leaders rise through the ranks of an organisation, their profile becomes more visible to employees and their increased power can have subtle and direct ramifications.

Aside from internal reflection, aspiring leaders also need to focus outwardly. One of the best ways to do this is to observe leaders within your organisation who have traits you would like to model and who have nurtured their careers to achieve the success you desire. In observing these people, list three behaviours or things they have done which you admire, three ways you describe their leadership style and three things your company values in a leader. In compiling this list, speak with others in your company to get an understanding of the qualities they are looking for in leaders. Armed with this list, you can then compare it with your assessment of yourself to identify areas for development.

With the knowledge of what you need to develop, the next step is to formulate a plan to help you get there.

In developing leaders, organisations are increasingly addressing hard skills like writing sales plans along with soft skills such as managing people. Blended learning solutions that combine personal assessment, skill-building and coaching to generate a new solution are the way of the future.

Basic management skills of process, control and communication are still needed and will probably continue to be taught in the traditional way, in classrooms or through mentoring. But in order for managers to become outstanding leaders, there needs to be a different and more scientific approach to management development, one that shows measurable results and ultimately has a positive impact on the bottom line.

Since leaders lead people, the style with which you do it is important. It must truly represent you and must fit with the situation, the results you wish to achieve and the people you hope will follow your lead. In truth having a particular style is not as essential to being a leader as having a vision of what could exist, being committed to the vision, bringing great energy to realizing that vision and having people to support you.

Having said that, the autocratic style of leadership is the less successful of all. It would be a good idea to develop a more involving style that gives you the benefit of exchange with and commitment from the people around you. This approach is especially useful to people within positions like yours who, by definition, can't tell others what to do (very often) and get away with it. If you have not learned the skills of working cooperatively with others in ways that allow them to see you as a leader, then learn those skills. If you find yourself dictating direction to people who regularly resist your well-intentioned efforts, then learn more participatory skills. When you have the skills, you can call on them. Without them, you are stuck with doing what you have done in the past, and you will get similar results.

A good leader is a symbol of the unity of an organization. They can express the values that hold an organization together. Most important, they can conceive and articulate goals that lift people up, carry them above conflict and unite them in pursuit of objectives worthy of their best efforts.

Leaders come in every size, shape, and disposition — short, tall, young, old, male and female. Nevertheless, they all seem to share some, if not all, of the following traits.

GUIDING VISION The leader has a clear idea of what he/she wants to do

professionally and personally — and the strength to persist in the face of setbacks, even failure.

PASSION The underlying passion of the promise of life combined with a very particular passion for a vocation, a profession and a course of action. Leaders love what they do and love doing it.

INTEGRITY Integrity may be divided into three essential parts: self-knowledge, candor and maturity. It is important that the leader never lies to him/herself, especially about him/herself. It is essential that you truly know yourself — your strengths, weaknesses, know what you want to do and why. Candor is the key to self-knowledge. Candor is based in the honesty of thought and action, a steadfast devotion to principle, and a fundamental soundness and wholeness. A good and effective leader cannot cut his/her conscience to fit this year's fashion. Maturity is important to a leader, because leading is not simply showing the way or issuing orders. Every leader needs to have experienced and grown through following — learning to be dedicated, observant, capable of working with and learning from others, never servile and always truthful.

Integrity is the basis of trust, which is not as much an ingredient of leadership as it is a product. The one product that cannot be acquired is trust. It must be earned. Trust is not only getting people on your side, but also having them stay there.

CURIOSITY AND DARING

Leaders wonder about everything, want to learn as much as they can and are willing to take risks, experiment and try new things. They do not worry about failure, but embrace errors, knowing they will learn from them.

For Asian budding leaders to compete with the world's best, senior managers need to embrace the latest techniques of human leadership development. The price of not doing so will create plenty of managers, but very few leaders.

Finally, remember: Leadership is a journey, not something that can be learned on a five-day training course. It requires time and reflection. ☐

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