

Fundamentals of Leading for Junior Leaders

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Abstract

The concept of leadership is not new; it is perhaps as old as the man himself. The only difference is that it got unprecedented attention from corporate culture and the phenomenal growth of educational institutions and universities during the last decades of 20th century. There is almost unanimity of views by the management academia, corporate sector as well as military organisations across the globe that formal as well as informal organisations need leaders, not just managers. This realisation of the significance of the concept of leadership is more pronounced for higher level jobs than for the middle and first-level tasks. In this paper, the author would discuss some of the fundamental principles and practices, which make the necessity of the application of the concept of leadership at junior levels of organisations inescapable. Further, some cautionary notes are also recommended for the aspiring junior leaders, so that they can avoid them as they progress in their pursuit for excellence in their areas of responsibilities.

Keywords: Leadership, Communication, Behavior

Introduction

Realisation of importance of the concept of leadership was perhaps recognised as early as man started living in groups and communities. All types of group efforts, teamwork and nation building need the people at the helm of affairs, who display vision, understand the mission of their organisations and infuse motivation in their people in order to attain the common goals. There is almost consensus among academicians that leaders are not only needed at the higher echelons of organisations, but are required at every tier of management. The organisations, which nurture leaders in their organisational settings, are noted to be the most effective in accomplishing their objectives. On the other hand, the organisations that fail to groom suitable leaders at every level of management usually end up wasting their resources. Such organisations often consider it adequate to leave the task of running their affairs to smart and efficient managers. While no one can ignore the significance of the job of managers in the contemporary enterprises, good

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management practices alone cannot get optimum productivity in today's high-tech and extremely competitive corporate environment. What modern organisations need at all levels of management, is leadership, not merely managership. The maximum of Peter Drucker and Warren Bennis, Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things," also underlines this need.

Aim of this paper is to let the people working at junior levels understand and assimilate the fundamentals of leading and make efforts to apply these in their personal as well as professional lives.

Managers, Commanders and Leaders

In literature on management and leadership, the terminologies like managers, commanders and leaders are frequently used interchangeably. However, there are vital variations among these constructs. First, managers, commanders and leaders tend to comprehend the organisational systems in different ways. Second, they use different sources of acquiring power or authority in the organisational settings. Third, they tend to focus on different goals as well as aspirations. Fourth, they tend to approach organisational change in different manners. And finally, they display different assumptions about the organisational behaviour of the people working with them. Therefore, it is necessary to understand what managers, commanders and leaders do in their areas of responsibility before one can dwell upon the fundamentals of leading. Following table display a tentative account of organisational behaviour of managers, commanders and leaders:-

Managers	Commanders	Leaders
Focus on maintenance of the system.	Focus on redefining the system.	Focus on transforming the system to the desired goals.
Follow the existing rules, regulations and policies.	Try to make their own rules, regulations and policies.	Do the lawful and ethical activities.
Draw authority from organisational structure.	Get power from their ability to reward and punish.	Draw authority from their character and charisma.
Focus on efficiency of the system (the bottom line).	Focus on their agenda.	Focus on effectiveness (the top line).
Prefer to maintain the status quo in the organisation.	Challenge the status quo in the organisation.	Change the things that ought to be changed.

Tend to manage by rules.	Tend to rule by fear.	Tend to lead by example.
Tend to believe that people work for the system.	Think that people work for them.	Realise that people work with them for their own selves

Principles and Practices of Leadership

The earliest approach to understand the concept of leadership has been cited as Traits Theory. According to this theory, successful leaders appear to possess certain personality and character traits, which help them to lead people in different scenarios. Consequently, it is believed that leaders are born with certain traits and that everyone cannot become a leader by training, developing or making personal efforts. Some of the widely referred traits include vision, courage, enthusiasm, emotional stability, wisdom, inspirational power, foresight, and so on. In order to further explore the viability of the traits theory, answers to the following questions are worth-probing:-

- Are people born with vision, or do they cultivate vision as they live their lives?
- Are people courageous by birth or do they learn to become courageous?
- Is emotional stability inherited from forefathers, or gained with personal efforts?
- Are people enthusiast by birth, or can someone learn to be enthusiast?
- Are people wise by birth, or do they become wise in the process of going through various life experiences?
- Is inspirational power God-gifted, or can one learn to inspire?
- Are people born with foresight, or can one learn this trait?

After pondering over the above questions, one may agree that people are not born with leadership traits; rather, they make a choice to accept leadership responsibilities by making concerted efforts to prove themselves equal to the task. Secondly, the belief regarding “born leaders” is neither supported by empirical evidence nor validated on the basis of some irrefutable evidence. Therefore, any one can aspire to become a leader if he learns to live his life according to certain principles and practices. In the following paragraphs, some principles and practices are suggested for those, who volunteer themselves to be leader:-

- i). Honesty: The famous proverb, “Honesty is the best policy”, underlines the importance of this character trait in all human

- interactions. However, one must be aware that mere talk about honesty would not be enough; a leader would have to prove his oral assertions with appropriate actions. A leader is usually required to display this trait at personal as well as institutional levels. Of all the leadership qualities, which a person must have, honesty is the most important.
- ii). Equity: Equity means the quality of being fair and reasonable in a way that gives equal treatment to everyone. (Collins Cobuild Advanced Learner's English Dictionary, 2003) A leader's behaviour with his people must not be based on his personal liking or disliking, ethnicity, creed or mere idiosyncrasies. Equitable behaviour of a leader becomes even more essential, when he realises that his own unjust conduct deprives him of the privilege of being the leader of all of his people. This happens because the employees, who consider the behaviour of their senior as partial and unfair, would not take such a person as their leader. In a nutshell, the guiding principle for junior leaders to ensure equitable behaviour towards people must be based on higher ethical values.
 - iii). Loyalty: Loyalty is the quality of staying firm in your friendship or support for someone or something. (Collins Cobuild Advanced Learner's English Dictionary, 2003) Junior leaders must show their loyalty towards their senior leader through thick and thin by carrying out the tasks entrusted to them even when they do not always agree with or understand their leader's decisions and actions. Remember, being loyal does not mean that you display sycophant behaviour. Loyalty demands that you must give your candid opinion or suggestion to your leader. But, once the decision has been finalised, the junior leaders ought to use all their abilities to execute the decision.
 - iv). Show Interest in Your People: Showing interest in others is a very powerful motivational boost, which junior leaders must use. They can do this by visiting the workstations of their employees to get firsthand knowledge of what they are doing, what are general working conditions, what he can do as a leader to improve their places of work, or what are their real needs and aspirations.
 - v). Forgive Mistakes and Learn to be Magnanimous: In organisational settings, mistakes are unavoidable. A leader's main role demands that mistakes remain within the acceptable limits. Many mistakes are made in good faith. In fact, mistakes serve as stepping stones for learning useful lessons, making amends and for improving the existing management system. In

case of trivial mistakes, the junior leaders ought to keep their cool, but make it a point to simply mention these mistakes to the concerned staff without making much fuss. However, one must not ignore incidents involving breach of the laid-down rules, safety regulations or moral requirements. An appropriate departmental or organisational probe must be initiated in such cases.

- vi). Master your Communication Skills: Communication has four distinct elements, namely reading, writing, speaking and listening. It is commonly observed that most of the organisations spend a lot of resources on enhancing the first three elements. However, when it comes to mastering the listening skills, not many efforts are considered necessary. Perhaps it is assumed that very little effort is needed to acquire this skill. One must understand that listening is not same as hearing. We hear from ears, but listen from hearts. In order to become an effective listener, one must develop empathy with the speaker.
- vii). Leadership Behaviour under Unusual Circumstances: A lot depends on leadership behaviour when a group performs extremely well according to set objectives. This is the time of testing real leadership. Nothing motivates the employees more than praise for their good efforts. However, if leader takes all the credit for good performance of his people, he immediately loses the respect of his people. Further, he also misses an opportunity to motivate his people and sows the seeds of discontentment and dejection among them. In other words, he gives his people the message that they are not contributing towards common goals; rather they are working to achieve his personal agenda. But, if the group flounders in achieving success, the same leader does not accept the responsibility of failure. In fact, he puts all the blame of low performance on his subordinates and comes clean out of the imbroglio. Experience tells that as soon as a leader abdicates his responsibility, he loses his right to lead. A real leader is always courageous enough to accept the responsibility of failures of his people. In a nutshell, leadership behaviour must get a cue from the following proverb:-

*“Give more credit to your people than they expect;
accept more blame than you deserve.”*

Cautions

Fulfilling the role of a leader is not everybody's cup of tea. It is the most arduous task in any undertaking. First and foremost, a leader must walk

on his talk. He simply can't get willing and enthusiastic behaviour from his people if he gives them such inkling: "Do whatever I say; don't do whatever I do?" Following are some of the advisements for junior leaders, if they choose to make efforts for becoming effective, inspirational leaders:

- (a) Don't be a Miser: Miserliness is not confined to money matters only; it concerns a wide spectrum of human behaviour. For instance, some people are noted to be praise-miser; they make it a point to refrain from commending the performance of their team members. Perhaps, they can't think of letting someone else stealing the limelight from them. They do not realise that when they fail to praise, they fail to get willing and enthusiastic cooperation from their people in future ventures. In addition, they fail to enjoy good feelings, which flow as a natural outcome of praising others. In this context, Dr. Wyne Dyer says:-

"Research has shown that a simple act of kindness directed toward another improves the functioning of the immune system and stimulates the production of serotonin in both the recipient of the kindness and the person extending the kindness. Even more amazing is the persons observing the act of kindness have similar beneficial results."

[Dyre, 2002]

- (b) Do Not Procrastinate – Take Action: On the issue of doing things without any delay, following tongue in cheek maxim of Sam Levenson is worth-remembering:-
"I'm going to stop putting things off starting tomorrow."

Some people develop a habit of putting things off with a view to get all information before they can make a decision. While in some cases, it is the only option; in several situations, delay causes inertia in decision making process. One must remember that organisations hire managers so that they (the managers) can make decisions and execute them, even when all information about a task, issue or problem is not available. Additional benefit of performing tasks within the given time-frame is reduction in one's unhealthy stress in one's professional life.

- (c) Don't Insist on Perfection: In recent years, competition among personnel has resulted in insistence of managers and leaders on perfection. While perfection is a mirage, which is neither achievable nor desirable, you must always demand excellence from your own self as well as from people under you.

- (d) Don't Micromanage: Leaping strides in computers, information technology and automated operations have immensely contributed towards manifold increase in organisational output across the globe. All these developments must have resulted in reduced workload of managers and leaders enabling them to spend more time for leisure, happiness or with their families. But, as a matter of fact, instead of enjoying the leisure time or spending their managerial time on important activities, several managers are seen opting for micromanaging various organisational tasks to keep them as well as their subordinates busy. In most of the situations, such behaviour of managers has proved to be dysfunctional. Micromanagement also often leads to situations, whereby the subordinate managers feel demotivated and disempowered. In order to get things done efficiently and effectively, a manager must tell his people what to do, rather than burying oneself in minute details.
- (e) Never Get Involved in Gossiping about Womenfolk: This advisement deals with a very sensitive aspect of our daily lives. As a junior leader, you must refrain from discussing womenfolk and demand the same from your people. Your actions in this regard must get a cue from the famous adage, "Do to others, what you want them to do for you."
- (f) Don't concentrate on those Mistakes, Which can't be Corrected: Nearly all of us make mistakes. Mistakes and failures are the stepping stones towards ultimate success. Further, there are some mistakes, which simply cannot be corrected, for e.g., events or happenings of the past. As a junior leader, you must have patience to live with such problems. Following adage also guides us what action to be taken in different scenarios:-
- "Lord, give me the courage to change the things which can and ought to be changed, the serenity to accept the things which cannot be changed, and the wisdom to know the difference."*
- [The Alcoholics Anonymous Prayer]
- (a) Don't React to Negative Behaviour of Others: Some people try to justify their negative behaviour on the premise that they were themselves treated badly by other people, who might be their seniors, colleagues or even juniors. One must keep in mind that negative behaviour of any individual is based largely on one's thoughts. If one keeps on rewinding and playing the episode of unpleasant encounter, it keeps the animosity alive. Holy Qur'an guides the mankind to resolve such problems in the following verse:-

“Repel evil with what is good. Then you will find your erstwhile enemy like a close, affectionate friend. Only they attain it who forebear, and only a man of great good fortune can achieve it.”
[34-35 – 41, Ha Mim As-Sajdah]

Therefore, whenever or wherever an episode of pain, injury or insult occurs, it immediately calls for doing a noble act. As soon as a noble act is played, it nullifies the obnoxious atmosphere. If one does not find a suitable dignified response to counter the loathsome act, one can try to send a silent prayer for the offender. The author has attempted both the above-stated remedies and was amazed to experience the spiritual power of them.

Conclusion

Interest in the study of the concept of leadership has been rising for the last two decades or so. Leadership is not only required at the top management level; rather it is needed at every tier of management. The organisations, which make conscious efforts to groom leaders, are seen to be far ahead of their contemporaries in pursuing their mission objectives. In this paper, several fundamentals of leading for junior leaders are discussed. They involve honesty, equity, showing one's interest in others, adopting the habit of forgiving mistakes, expectations about employees' performance, and leadership behaviour under unusual circumstances. Further, junior leaders ought to be cautious of certain actions, like miserliness, preference for perfect operations, putting things off, micromanagement, gossiping about womenfolk, negative behaviour of others and change management. It is expected that by adopting the above-stated principles and practices in one's personal and professional lives, junior leaders would be able to enjoy fulfilling personal lives as well as prove themselves the precious assets for their organisations.

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