Exemplary Leadership Principles

Eleonore Verkerk

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SAGU Harrison Graduate School

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Abstract

The following document represents the product of detailed research into three of the "five practices of exemplary leadership" as presented in *The Leadership Challenge* by Kouzes and Posner (2007). This research was intended to include a number of sources from a collection of authors and other research projects. A few books were utilized as sources for this research while still maintaining *The Leadership Challenge* as the primary resource. This research resulted in the reaffirming and strengthening of the following three practices as highly important to achieving the extraordinary: model the way, enable others to act, and encourage the heart.

Introduction

In *The Leadership Challenge*, Kouzes and Posner identify what they believe to be the "five practices of exemplary leadership." These practices represent the critical responsibilities of a leader striving to accomplish something extraordinary. A leader cannot achieve such great things on their own; they must lead a team towards a unified vision. Leaders must spur others to work together to the best of their abilities. Achieving the extraordinary is not a simple or short process; such things take time. Therefore a leader must also learn how to keep the team spirit high and celebrate along the way. Each of these responsibilities are of high importance and worthy of deeper study and examination. Undoubtedly, leaders must know how to model the way, enable others to act, and encourage the hearts of others in order to accomplish the extraordinary.

Model the Way

If you want to lead people to a fountain, first, you have to start walking. It is impossible to effectively lead people towards something, without going yourself. Followers, by definition, must be shown where to go. Leaders are the ones who pave the way, who provide direction and vision. Rarely will a person achieve success blindly, they must be taught and shown the

directions in which to work in order to meet a given goal or achieve a specific vision. Therefore, leaders must be willing to model the way.

Simon Sinek affirms in his book *Start with Why*: "people don't buy what you do, they buy why you do it" (Sinek, 2009, pg. 41). When applying this principle strictly to leadership of a team it stands to reason that people won't follow what you do, they will follow why you do it. When modeling the way, an exemplary leader acts out of purpose and values in order to gain a following from those around him. It is not a leader's title or responsibilities that establish influence, but rather the values that he affirms through his actions. People will not want to follow a leader if they don't know what he stands for. According to Kouzes and Posner in *The Leadership Challenge* (2007, pg. 47): "people expect their leaders to speak out on matters of values and conscience." However, this responsibility of leadership is impossible to do if you don't know what you stand for. You must clearly understand your own personal values in order to speak up on behalf of them. Kouzes and Posner (2007, pg. 47) put it this way: "to earn and sustain personal credibility, you must first be able to clearly articulate deeply held beliefs." Influence comes from establishing credibility with others; credibility is gained by identifying your deepest beliefs and letting those beliefs become the "why" behind everything you do.

Once you have determined your own personal values it is important for a leader to identify and affirm the shared values of all those within the organization. Shared values create a foundation of common understanding within an organization. Without this foundation of understanding there are sure to be numerous disagreements which can lead to "intense conflict, false expectations, and diminished capacity" (Kouzes and Posner, 2007, pg. 60). Shared values, also called operating values, are core beliefs held by everyone on a team that inspire certain behaviors which lead to results. In addition, shared values create a working environment "with

an allowance for certain kinds of behaviors and a prohibition against others" (Cloud, 2013, pg. 160). Establishing shared values within the organization helps create culture and build trust between all of its members, especially trust in the leader. Just as it is important that a leader boldly articulate their personal set of values, "what leaders say must be consistent with the aspirations of their constituents" (Kouzes and Posner, 2007, pg. 60). If leaders stand for things that do not line up with the collective values, it will be impossible for them to mobilize people within the team. Leaders must take the collective understanding, or shared values, and be the representation of these principles. Leaders must learn to model the shared values of the organization in order to inspire the same actions in others. They must be able to affirm shared values within the community.

People don't just pay attention to the leader; they pay attention to everyone on the team or within the organization. People will watch the others around them to see if their actions reflect the company's shared values. The leader himself cannot demonstrate consistency between values and actions. Therefore, every person within the organization must be a representative of the values of the collective. Every person must set an example. It is the leader's responsibility to make sure that their actions line up with the shared values. Leaders must teach people what is expected of them by clearly communicating the shared values in every situation. Leaders must also reinforce good behaviors so that people will repeat them. Everybody, even a leader, needs feedback to gain perspective and keep on the right track. Therefore, leaders must provide feedback to their constituents. Feedback is a good way of "reinforcing what they're doing right, and helping them correct what they are doing wrong" (Kouzes and Posner, 2007, pg. 92).

Clearly there is more to modeling the way than simply being a good person or driven leader. In order to effectively model the way for others leaders must establish personal values,

affirm shared values, and then teach others to set the example as well. When a leader successfully models the way for his constituents he will be able to gain commitment from them and inspire them to achieve even the highest of standards. “People follow first the person, then the plan” (Kouzes and Posner, 2007, pg. 16). Modeling the way is about gaining the respect to lead through personal involvement and inspiring action.

Enable Others to Act

It takes more than just a single person to achieve truly extraordinary tasks. It takes a team effort. Creating effective teams is hard work. It requires trust and collaboration. Every person needs to feel confident not only in their own abilities but in the abilities of the entire team. “To get extraordinary things done, leaders have to enable others to act” (Kouzes and Posner, 2007, pg. 20). Leaders must make it possible for others to perform at their highest capacity and foster a spirit of collaboration and teamwork within their organization in order to achieve their greatest dreams.

When it comes to building teamwork and achieving goals, trust is key. “Trust is the starting point and makes it all work” (Cloud, 2013, pg. 171). Before a team can work effective with one another they must build trust. Trust forms the foundation which enables teams to perform to the best of their ability. Trust is “the central issue in human relationships within and outside organizations” (Kouzes and Posner, 2007, pg. 224). People like to feel trusted. When

they feel trusted they are more likely to innovate and work harder. People enjoy the company of someone who is trusting and seek those types of people out as friends. In addition, when one person trusts another they are more likely to listen and accept input from them (Kouzes and Posner, 2007, pg. 225). Trust builds synergy within a team as each member is empowered and kept accountable to achieve their goals with excellence individually and as a group. When a team completely trusts one another, "they know that they are *for* each other and *for* the shared interests of the team" (Cloud, 2013, pg. 172). The whole team will be dedicated to achieving the goals of the organization across all functions, even though it sometimes costs them personally.

In addition to building trust, leaders also must focus on creating a since of interdependence within their organization. Leaders need to foster collaboration within their teams in order to accomplish something extraordinary. Interdependence creates a culture in which "everyone knows that they cannot succeed unless everyone else succeeds" (Kouzes and Posner, 2007, pg. 233). This culture supports positive teamwork and putting group goals before personal achievement. In order to develop this culture of interdependence, in which each person knows that they can all depend on one another, a leader needs to develop group goals and roles. Each person on the team should know what the team is working towards and exactly what they can contribute to achieve those goals. Leaders should create a system which requires the team members to all work together in order to be able to achieve success. In order for cooperation to be successful, "roles must be designed so that every person's contributions are both additive and cumulative to the final outcome" (Kouzes and Posner, 2007, pg. 234). Each person should carry a piece of the puzzle for success. Once the team has rallied together under one common goal, they are on the path to achieving great things. However, it is the leader's job to facilitate this collaboration throughout the entire organization.

One of the most difficult lessons a leader has to learn falls into the category of enabling others to act. When it comes to empowering others to action, leaders need to operate with an understanding of the paradox of power: "you become more powerful when you give your own power away" (Kouzes and Posner, 2007, pg. 251). It is so important that leaders make their constituents feel confident, capable and strong. People who feel powerless have a tendency to "hoard whatever shreds of power they have" (Kouzes and Posner, 2007, pg. 251) Leaders must fight this tendency and learn to empower those around them to take responsibility. In this way, leaders need to coach their constituents, giving them the reigns for their own growth and success (*Mentoring Matters*, 2013, pg. 96). A leader should inspire others to take ownership and utilize ingenuity throughout their work. Leaders should shy away from telling people how to do things. "Tell them what to do, and they will surprise you with their ingenuity" (*Mentoring Matters*, 2013, pg. 177). Empowering is a great tool in enabling others to act.

Enabling others to act is an important principle for all leaders. A leader will never truly be able to achieve their greatest dreams without inspiring others to get on board. Leaders must be able to effectively build trust, foster collaboration, and empower others within their organization in order to achieve extraordinary things.

Encourage the Heart

Often, the road to achieving the extraordinary can be long and difficult. Along the way people will get tired and even want to give up. However, it is the job of the leader to encourage the hearts of their constituents. Leaders must learn how to bring encouragement to the team and individuals through recognizing their contributions and celebrating victories.

Recognition is a great tool for leaders to encourage and motivate those around them. Recognition is "acknowledging good results and reinforcing positive performance" (Kouzes and Posner, 2007, pg. 281). Leaders should aim to create an environment within their organization in which each person's contributions are noticed and appreciated. It is very common for people in high-performing organizations to work long, hard hours. Therefore, it is highly important that they feel appreciated for all of the work that they put in, so that they might not grow weary. People need to be encouraged regularly to keep them working at a high capacity for months at a time. People will need "the will to continue and the courage…to continue the journey" (Kouzes and Posner, 2007, pg. 281). Recognition and encouragement can also motivate people to work hard towards certain achievements or standards as they see others' achievement bringing real rewards. In this case, recognition should always be offered in congruency with an organization's values. If an organization values "leadership and excellence, it is important to recognize and reward those qualities" (*Mentoring Matters*, 2013, pg. 211). Recognition must be given generously, yet meaningfully, and always for the right reasons.

In order for recognition to really be meaningful, it must be personal. Too often, leaders engage in cookie-cutter forms of recognition that are highly predictable, tedious, and impersonal. This type of approach to recognition feels "disingenuous, forced, and thoughtless" (Kouzes and Posner, 2007, pg. 292). Eventually, such feelings will actually promote cynicism and de-value the team and its goals. Leaders must make a conscious effort to reward people with personal

recognition. When a leader personalizes recognition it "sends the message that someone took the time to notice the achievement, seek out the responsible individual, and personally deliver praise in a timely manner" (Kouzes and Posner, 2007, pg. 292). Even the simplest form of recognition, such as a properly timed "thank you," can be incredibly encouraging to a team member when it is made personal. In order for a leader to be able to properly personalize rewards and recognition he must take the time to get to know his constituents. If a leader wants to truly personalize recognition, he must look past the person's responsibilities or job duties and see the real person. A leader needs to really know his team members what their likes and dislikes are, what kind of hobbies they partake in, their thoughts and opinions. Personalization is not achieved simply by purchasing something off of a list of favorite things. Personalization comes from really knowing a person; it comes from relationship.

Another great method of encouragement can be found in celebration. Leaders should understand the benefits of celebration as a team building activity that can motivate and encourage everyone within the organization. Corporate celebrations are not a wasteful distraction, but rather a strengthening asset for any team. Celebrations create a spirit of community throughout the organization. They foster relationship building and allow others to rejoice in the important milestones on the way to achieving their shared vision and goals. Kouzes and Posner (2007, pg.310) assert that celebrations are one of the most powerful ways for a team to "proclaim our respect and gratitude, to renew our sense of community, and to remind ourselves of the values and history that bind us together." A team that works together should celebrate together, and a team that celebrates together will be stronger for it.

Recognition and celebration are two sure ways for leaders to encourage the hearts of their constituents. Hitting times of difficulty and discouragement is inevitable; leaders must create a

culture of continual recognition and celebration in order to effectively combat these tough times along the journey. A leader with a healthy view of these two resources will be able to foster a strong sense of community within their organization and keep people motivated to achieve great things.

Conclusion

Extraordinary accomplishments do not happen on a whim or without intentional efforts. In order to accomplish something truly extraordinary a team must be have a solid foundation of trust, an atmosphere of collaboration, and strong community. People need to feel trusted, empowered, and encouraged. An organization can only succeed in achieving great dreams when it is led by a capable and exemplary leader. Exemplary leaders model the way for others, enable people towards empowered action, and encourage those around them in personal and meaningful ways.

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