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MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVES

Leadership

From the Editor

What do you want to know?

Me? I want to learn how electricity works, why paint stays on the wall, why giraffes have long necks, and ducks have webbed feet.

That's the simple stuff. The answers are buried in a book. But there are other things — things that aren't easily found — that I want to know.

I want to know the difference between Jerusalem and Salem, what separates demons and deities, what a wise person and a fool have in common, and if the real heroes are princes or paupers.

It doesn't stop there.

I want to know what the blind see and the deaf hear. I want to know what the colour green sounds like and what gender the letter Q is. I want to know what nothing feels like and how many everything is. I want to know why.

As management educators, we help organizations define what they want to know. We work with companies to push the limits of their knowledge, and discover new territories of wisdom, insight, and simple truth that can help your organization grow.

Marilyn Baetz, editor

About the Author and the Article

There was a family of circus aerialists who was lead by a patriarch-philosopher. "All life is on the wire," he observed, "all else is waiting." Life was at its best, he knew, when he felt both the security and risk of the wire.

Stephen Baetz has drawn a similar argument for leadership: leaders are most alive, contribute most, when they balance the tension of a leadership paradox.

"A paradox creates a dilemma," Stephen writes, "a tension if you will, that ought not to be resolved in favour of one side or the other." He goes on to define six important leadership paradoxes and the tension they create. At the conclusion of the article, he offers a practical technique for thinking about where you are with the tension created by a leadership paradox.

Stephen Baetz is a principal of LIVE Consultants, Inc., the organization sponsoring this publication.



Stephen Baetz

Living With Tension

You know the time — when morning comes much too early and you're thankful for the harness of habit or otherwise you would stay in bed.

The radio was on, cajoling me to give another day a chance while at the same time frightening me with crises and calamities. It is at this moment that I am never sure I get it right.

The host was asking the guest to reflect on the implication of scientists being able to clone sheep ... a scientific act which has caused much consternation because it appears that such an achievement is getting too close: it could be a short step to humans. I'm not sure I like the comparison. The host posed his next question, "What are the ethics?"

"Most scientists are more interested in the question of how," the guest reflected, "and tend to ignore the question *why?* — why is it important to learn how?"

I found a shirt, matched a tie, and pulled out a suit ... considering what I thought I had heard and drawing the parallels to management. Then back to rejoin the dialogue. "Scientists have to do both, ask why and how," the guest continued. "They must have that balance to be fully responsible."

Why balanced with how. Not bad, I thought ... an essential paradox — limited curiosity. And from that moment on I was awake considering the wisdom of balancing the essential paradoxes of leadership. That's right, balancing. A paradox creates a dilemma, a tension if you will, that ought not to be resolved in favour of one side or the other. Too limited and the curiosity quotient drops like a stone; too curious and every idea seems worth pursuing and little or nothing is accomplished.

What, then, are the other paradoxes of leadership? What is the nature of helpful tension?

Aligned entrepreneurship

Leaders own the responsibility of achieving and accomplishing results — whether that is defined as increasing efficiency, value, revenue, or intellectual capital or decreasing

costs, wastage, customer dissatisfaction, or counterproductive processes. That sense of ownership should be driven by a passion to contribute and make a difference. On the other hand, leaders must align their efforts with the purpose, values, and strategies of the organization. As well, they must co-operate and share resources and avoid the temptation to have their way at the expense of others.

Controlled empowerment

Leaders understand the wisdom of creating environments where every member of the team feels the freedom, indeed the unspoken obligation, to make decisions that will move the enterprise forward. In a world with customers who require efficient, accurate, high-quality service and products, every member of the team has to feel that they have the power to act in service of the customer and the organization.

And leaders also understand the value of having reasonable and appropriate controls in place so the organization is viewed by its suppliers and customers as being consistent and fair.

Invisible support

There are times and places where leaders must rally the troops. They must be willing to deliver clear messages about what must be accomplished, about what is valued, about what ought to be supported by everyone. Sometimes this is done on a one-to-one basis ... sometimes in a group ... and always with vitality and passion. Leaders understand that if their words are too halting, some will worry and wither for lack of support.

However, if a leader dominates airtime, if a leader is the only one to talk it up, or if a leader is constantly acting as a cheerleader, others will fall silent and not pick up the torch.

Leaders must realize that the support they offer must be invisible and felt. For example, we all know that education and development will fail if senior management doesn't take a strong role but the ultimate viability and success

depends on the broad base of middle management commitment. Leaders have to find a way to communicate their support and yet be invisible so others can find ways to contribute.

Constrained vision

Leaders craft vision ... they define the nature of the business, how the future will be won, the core values, and the essential traditions. They take every opportunity they can to stretch minds, to help others imagine the possibilities, to dream. Leaders see what the future can hold and their description of it draws people forward.

At the same time, leaders must ensure that the team is focused on the day-to-day, that they have the ability to generate revenues and manage costs *today*, and that they can execute and deliver what is expected by the customer today.

Leaders must have the capacity to see today and tomorrow at the same time.

Serious fun

Leaders must communicate by their actions that the work of the enterprise is serious business — worth doing and worth doing well. A serious approach communicates that the disciplines of the business are worth learning and living by and that work ought to be done with polish, poise, and elegance.

At the same time, leaders know that they can't take the effort of the enterprise so seriously that they can't laugh at the absurd, see a possibility in the ridiculous, or see problems in perspective. They understand that in playful moments creative ideas can be born.

Open focus

Leaders listen, they engage every mind, they keep their options open, and they keep themselves posted on what's new. Beyond that they are fascinated by innovations and invest in experimentation. They read, they

dialogue, they gather people around them who think differently than they do, and they test assumptions and accepted wisdom.

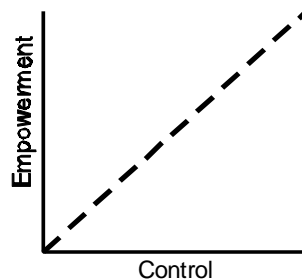
However, as much as they are open, leaders have a remarkable ability to focus on what is important. They are clear-headed about purpose and can define what is a priority issue and what is not. They discard the non essentials and cut to the heart of the matter — even if it makes others around them uncomfortable.

More than awareness

Recognizing the nature of the paradox is important. However, there should be no effort made by a leader to resolve the tension created in the paradox itself. The tension is essential.

In fact, the more helpful approach is to determine whether you are off balance. That's right, off balance.

Try graphing each paradox. This is a simple technique that was described in a recent issue of *Fortune* magazine. For example, place control on the x-axis and empowerment on the y-axis and then draw a line at a 45 degree angle from where the x and y axes meet. That line is the balance between the two.



Then plot where your team is right now using a scale of 1 to 10 on each axis. The ideal would be a 10 on each of the dimensions. From there, you can figure out what adjustments you need to make as a leader — how you might right the balance as it were.

The fate of leadership is to live with the tension of the paradox. Leaders must sustain the tension the paradox creates.

Focused On Development

As a team of management educators, we work with organizations who believe that the quality of their human resource is a strategic advantage.

To do that, we have services and products that provide you with the attitudes, skills, and knowledge you need to be successful.

Each service and every product must pass several tests before we offer them to you.

- They must be practical and down-to-earth.
- They must be readily applicable to business challenges.
- They must improve results.
- They must be useful solutions both now and in the longer term.
- They must leave the organization stronger.

With these tests applied, we avoid solutions that are unrealistic, complicated, or fads.

Instead, you get processes that work and are bought into easily. You have education programs that encourage change and improvement. You have employees that have durable skills and knowledge.

We provide service in each of these areas:

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- **education and training,**
- **management development surveys,**
- **facilitator assessments,**
- **strategic planning, and**
- **team building.**

Each is focused on the development of people and the organization.

For more information about our services, contact us at (519) 664-2213.