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Leadership

From the Editor

The other night I watched as the Canadian Women's hockey team won their eighth straight world title over the American Women's team. The win for Canada was billed as quite a feat; they had lost to that same team a few nights earlier.

As I watched, I wondered, "What has happened with the Canadian team that has allowed them to turn their game around?" Each member of the team played with remarkable focus and intensity.

Haley Wickenheiser, one of the team captains, seemed to answer that question when she said, "This team just finds a way to do it all the time." Such a straightforward way to talk about consistent, flawless execution in a team. The Canadian Head Coach, Karen Hughes, explained that "you could tell at lunch time there was that special feeling, everybody knew what they had to do."

At LIVE Consultants, we help organizations find a way to do it all the time and get everybody knowing what contribution they have to make. This is the essence of teamwork.

Marilyn Baetz, editor

About the Author and the Article

Can leadership be boiled down to a process or reduced to a formula? Is leadership as simple as being principled? Is it about mimicking leadership heroes?

In this article, Stephen wonders why the literature around leadership has been reduced to simple answers, processes, and formulae. However he doesn't leave us lamenting that fact. He adds to the debate by offering several observations about the challenges of leadership.

Stephen is a principal of LIVE Consultants Inc., the organization that sponsors this publication.



Stephen Baetz

Leaders Help Win the Future

I find humour in the funniest places. Not so long ago, it was a bookstore. Chapters ... or was it Indigo? It matters not. I was there looking for a Rhyming Dictionary (the reason is too unintelligible and probably insignificant to anybody but me.) As is my ritual, I wandered over to the business section to see what, if anything, was new. I have this sense of professional responsibility to keep up with the latest, as if that is possible.

Nice change, I thought. They have finally figured out that business is different than financial management for individuals and divided the business shelves into subsections. Leadership had five full shelves. The titles? There were yards dedicated to *leadership heroes* — “Leadership Secrets of the World’s Most Successful CEOs,” “Jack Welch on Leadership,” “The Leadership Secrets of Colin Powell,” Phil Jackson’s “Sacred Hoops: Spiritual Lessons of a Hardwood Warrior,” “What it Takes to Be #1: Vince Lombardi on Leadership,” “Business the Bill Gates Way: 10 Secrets of the World’s Richest Business Leader,” “Guts: 8 Laws of Business from One of the Most Innovative Business Leaders of Our Time,” “Business Leaders & Success: 55 Top Business Leaders & How They Achieved Greatness,” “In the Words of Great Business Leaders,” and “Think Like a Leader: 150 Top Business Leaders Show You How Their Minds Work.”

If those heroes are too modern try “Alexander The Great’s Art Of Strategy: The Timeless Leadership Lessons of History’s Greatest Empire Builder,” “Machiavelli on Modern Leadership: Why Machiavelli’s Iron Rules Are As Timely and Important Today as Five Centuries Ago,” “Be * Know * Do: Leadership The Army Way, Adapted From The Official Army Leadership Manual,” and if you wanted the real thing, “The U.S. Army Leadership Field Manual,” “No Excuse Leadership: Lessons from the U.S. Army’s Elite Rangers,” “Preventing Biological Warfare: The Failure of American Leadership,” “Nixon’s Ten Commandments Of Statecraft: His Guiding Principles Of Leadership And Negotiation,” (you are noticing the slide downhill I’m sure),

and then there was “Continue to Pester, Nag, and Bite: Churchill’s War Leadership.”

If your fancy was for a less pugnacious approach, they had that too. “Benedictine Rule Of Leadership: Classic Management Secrets You Can Use Today,” “Running With The Giants: What Old Testament Heroes Want You to Know About Life and Leadership,” “The Genius of Sitting Bull: Thirteen Heroic Strategies for Today’s Business Leaders,” and “The Second Coming of Steve Jobs.”

They had goofy entries as well. My fav was “Movies To Manage By: Lessons in Leadership from Great Films.”

Funny? It could be if it wasn’t so sad. There appears to be a book writing and publishing industry out there that is built on the idea that documenting what high profile leaders do can be a real help to the rest of us.

If you did have the time and inclination to plough through the paragraphs and chapters to figure out the secrets, laws, lessons, strategies, and/or commandments, you’d be left with the question, “Who should I believe?” Jack or Bill? Phil or Vince? Alex or Mac? Dick or Winston? (Okay that might be a little easier to figure out) Moses or Sitting Bull?

On those same five shelves were books that told the reader that leadership was simply about having emotional intelligence, about power, about “gamesmanship,” about versatility, about values, about personal confidence, about charisma. Others told the reader to communicate more, to make changes more quickly, to focus the organization on the essentials, to know the business, to dream.

I left the section bemused.

At the same time, I have to recognize that there wouldn’t be so many books on the shelf if there weren’t people who were willing to buy them in the hope of finding an answer to a few basic questions:

- What is leadership?
- What should leaders do?
- What should leaders believe?
- How possible is it for me to be a leader?

So what can be said about leadership that hasn’t already been said? I offer these ideas as thought-starters.

The environment defines the task of a leader.

What a leader ought to be thinking about and doing are determined by the environment the leader is in. Some situations call for leaders who are valiant, courageous, bold. Other environments call for leaders who are reflective, strategic, planned. Some situations call for leaders who guide, encourage, and support. And other environments call for leaders who direct, show, and tell. There are times and places when all of that is required of a leader.

Therefore the leaders who last are those who can read what the environment calls for. Once they have that figured out, they determine whether they can adapt to those requirements or whether it would be better for them to move on where their approach matches with the demands and requirements of the situation.

People will only follow leaders they can trust.

Trust happens among leaders and followers for some or all of the following reasons: the leader is knowledgeable, the leader has the best interests of the organization/team at heart, the leader does what they say they are going to do, the leader sees a way to the future that seems possible, or the leader respects others. Whatever the reason(s) that followers have for trusting, the leader must understand and respond to those reasons.

Leadership is shared.

Leaders must develop an ability to depend on other leaders. One leader might be able to articulate what is happening in the environment and define the organizational mission. It will be other leaders who will communicate the destination, get others excited about it, and keep teams focused day-to-day.

In other situations, one leader might have an intimate knowledge of the marketplace and the competitive realities; other leaders will find ways to interpret those realities.

And it may even be other leaders who support and encourage everyone to make the changes required.

Leaders should not act independently or as if it is their leadership and their leadership alone that makes the difference. Leadership has to be shared by many if the organization is going to do what matters.

Leadership is both art and science.

I'm confused by those who claim that leadership can be done by formula ... or that leadership is merely a process ... that leadership is only about being principled ... or that leadership is as simple as remembering tried and true aphorisms.

Leadership is filled with complexities — from realizing how to balance competing interests to knowing when to take bold strokes, from being able to recognize opportunity to gaining the commitment and support of others, from knowing when to direct to understanding when to pull back.

Leaders must have the ability to live with complexity, for sure. As much as that, they must have the capacity to act incisively as if the handcuffs of complexity weren't present.

To do that, they must understand the medium with which they are working: people's hearts, minds, talents, and imaginations. That is an art. Leaders have to understand causality, be able to use information, and come to logical conclusions. That is science.

Leadership is in short supply.

There is not one of our clients who complains about having too many leaders. They may complain about having too many people who are opinionated. But being strongly opinionated ought not to be confused with leadership. Whatever this thing called leadership is, it appears there is far too little of it around and organizations wish they had more.

Most organizations fear that they are led more by events than by people who are clear about how to *win the future*.

Our customers have given us quite a reputation!

And that's not just because we deliver solutions that are practical, easily applied, and useful. Nor is it only because we provide the extras, deliver high quality on time, and create learning experiences that are involving, fun, and challenging. Nor is it because we have three decades of experience in this business that can be trusted. Although all of this is true.

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- *conduct* assessment centres to select the best internal facilitators,
- *evaluate* the quality of delivery,
- *build* teams,
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For more information about our services, contact us at (519) 664-2213.

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