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# Leadership

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## From the Editor

Last month we celebrated our 25<sup>th</sup> year of being in business as management educators. Consistent with what usually happens at such milestones, we spent equal amounts of time looking back and looking forward.

The nature of leadership activity has changed. There's less emphasis on position power, monitoring, and control; there's more emphasis on thinking, being flexible, developing people and teams. The focus of learning and development has changed. There is less emphasis on training and merely building skill sets that only serve the needs of the organization; there's more emphasis on helping individuals, teams, and the organization itself to build knowledge, improve practices, and acquire appropriate attitudes. We've moved from thinking about fixing individuals as the sole path to performance improvement to also thinking about the nature of the systems in which they work.

The look forward is always more difficult. To be expected, I suppose: the past seems to have answers and the future more questions.

Our commitment at LIVE Consultants is to work passionately and wisely with you to find the best possible responses to those questions — and, at the same time, have fun doing it.

*Marilyn Baetz, editor*

## About the Author and the Article

There's a long and sometimes tedious debate that goes on about whether leaders are made or born. It's unclear about what we might do differently if we were to ever solve that argument. In the meantime, the more useful enterprise is to define leadership *must-dos*.

In this article, Stephen asserts, "If you are a manager, you must be a leader; but you don't have to be a manager to be a leader." He comes to that conclusion after defining a half dozen leadership *musts*.

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

You may wish to pass this article along to a colleague or have them receive the publication every quarter. To do that, tell them to access our website at [www.liveconsultants.com](http://www.liveconsultants.com).



*Stephen Baetz*

# It's All About You

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There are times when the past and the present become as blurred as an old Charlie Chaplin movie. Everything that you can touch and see says *now*, everything you're hearing says *then*. That happened a couple of weeks ago when I was working with a group of senior managers in a strategic planning session. The dialogue was typical. Smaller, focused competitors make the marketplace more challenging; technology is a table stake and not a sustainable strategic advantage; employee satisfaction is the best predictor of customer satisfaction; shareholders expect an increase in ROI.

Several of the recent team members pushed for greater clarity. Maybe you've heard the monologue, "All our people want to know is what our single priority is ... if nothing more comes out of this conference than a simple statement of *the* most important issue to tackle, it will have been time well spent. We're pulling them in too many different directions." That was like a conductor yelling, "All aboard!" There was a mad scramble to support that train of thought. "We're making a simple business far too complex for our leaders as well. We should just declare whether we want operational efficiency or superior service; one or the other but not both."

This is when the blurring started to happen.

The President let the discussion go on for about 10 minutes and then leaned forward into the conversation. "This is a complex world. Simple solutions in a complex world don't work. If you think they do, give your head a shake. If it was possible to say do this and only this, we would have done that long ago." The tone and force of the message took me back to the '60s. He continued, "This is a complex world. If decisions were simple we wouldn't need leaders; all we'd do is issue a memo that says do this and this alone and be done with it. Leaders get paid — all of you get paid — to make balanced decisions in complex environments where you feel pulled in seven different directions at the same time." With that he closed his notebook and called a break.

Hear what I mean about blurring? It was a contemporary message delivered in a style that was reminiscent of 30 or 40 years earlier.

Of course, nobody liked the packaging. Few, however, could argue with the content: leaders must make balanced decisions in the face of complexities and competing agendas.

The experience got me thinking about what else I might have on a list of leadership *must-dos*. This is what I came up with. Leaders must ...

## Step Up to the Plate

One of the most often attributable quotes to Winston Churchill is, "The price of greatness is responsibility." In the face of problems which may thwart ambition and discourage others, a leader takes on the responsibility to gain resolution and move ahead. Leaders don't pass the buck, sit in the wings, hope that someone else will do something, or wish it were different. They take on obligations; they meet the demands; they shoulder the burden.

This does not mean that they take responsibility away from others or agree inappropriately to do what belongs to other members of the team. Far from it. In those situations, the responsibility they carry is to push others to own what is theirs or to make clear that they are depending on others to come through. Nor do they stop others from volunteering or limit the need for people to wrestle with an issue.

As appropriate, leaders take the issue on and, in doing so, inspire others with the strength and determination that is demonstrated.

## Inspire Others With Their Enthusiasm

Two Greek words form the root of the word *enthuse* and, in combination, define its nature: the spirit within. Enthusiastic people inspire others with positive messages that the task-at-hand is worthwhile and that it is possible. They give life to the idea that either an individual or a team does have the capabilities to take on difficult assignments and do them well.

Enthusiasm which infuses vitality into team life is more than sloganistic cheerleading which is often viewed as shallow and unrealistic. The enthusiasm which is contagious reminds others of the abilities they have and then invites them to try, to give themselves or the situation a chance. Enthusiastic leaders celebrate any victories earned and offer them as evidence that the bigger goal is attainable or the journey is worthwhile.

### **Read the Environment**

Leaders understand the vision, sure enough. They focus others on the future possibilities, sure enough. They see horizons that seem too far out to be possible, sure enough. They also understand where they are *now*.

They observe, they read, and they listen so they have a clear idea of the dynamics of the marketplace, of the organization, and of the team. They understand what assumptions and mental models others hold, what apprehensions others have, and what beliefs they embrace. They are sensitive to the vulnerabilities of others as well as of themselves. They know what differences really make a difference.

Leaders do this so they can adapt their behaviour to the requirements of the situation — they know when to speak and when to keep silent; they know when to push and when to pull; they know when to coach and when to let experience do the teaching; they know what they can control and what they can't; they know when to help and when to back off.

The most effective leaders can articulate what is going on around them and what their role should be in that situation.

### **Tell the Truth**

They tell what they know in a direct, yet caring, manner. Similarly, they tell what they don't know and what their limits of understanding are. Leaders are well aware of the differences among fact, inference, value judgement, and unsupported hunch; when they speak, they declare where they are coming from so there is no confusion about whether what is communicated is fact or inference. They avoid

communicating unsupported hunches not only because they create misunderstanding but also because they can be hurtful.

For a leader, honesty extends beyond what they say; they ensure there is a consistency between what they say and what they do. They know that actions speak louder than words.

Leaders will never speak or act to mislead or deceive; they avoid language that fogs; they never obscure reality with indirectness; they never weasel. If something is wrong or inaccurate, leaders never hide behind the cover that it was not their place to speak up or defer to rank or position. They know that honesty demands courage.

### **Think**

Of course, everyone thinks all of the time. The thinking of the leader, however, is about purpose, problems, possibilities, concepts, consequences, conduct, as well as ripples, risks, and rationale.

Leaders understand that to be thoughtless is often to be hurtful; to move to action too quickly is costly; to be glib is to minimize the significant.

Leaders recognize that listening is an efficient way to learn what someone else knows that they don't know. They listen to enrich their own thinking.

### **The Implication Is ...**

In the space of these four columns, I do not have a complete list of leadership must-dos. It is, at best, a start. The more I think about it, however, the more I understand that if you are a manager, you must be a leader; but you don't have to be a manager to be a leader.

Leadership is not about position; it is about you and what you do. Leaders make balanced decisions in the face of complexities and competing agendas, step up to the plate, inspire others with their enthusiasm, read the environment, tell the truth, and think. And it doesn't matter where you sit in an organization, *anybody* can do the must-dos and be recognized by others as a leader.

# 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.

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