

Learning about Leadership

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Calling upon my 35 years of experience as a military commissioned and noncommissioned officer, police patrol officer, chief of police, and as a trainer and consultant to the private sector, I have had the honor of analyzing hundreds of issues that leaders are confronted with on a daily basis. I have distilled these issues into three basic competencies that could help leaders become effective. The three competencies are as follows:

1. Playing three distinct roles daily and sometimes hourly.
 - The roles are leader, manager, and follower.
 - Leaders must know what role they should be in.
 - They must have a “mental model” of what success looks like in that role.
 - They must know the sequence and order of when to be in which role.
2. Dealing with the constant inconsistencies within the organization.
 - A misapplication of your role may block your view to resolving an inconsistency.
 - Leaders must learn to get out of their own way sometimes.
3. Knowing where the “point of the sword” (where the work is being accomplished) is.
 - Leaders must understand that the role they are in will affect where the point of the sword should be placed.
 - They must know what it takes to keep the sword sharp so that it does exactly, not more or less, but exactly what it is supposed to do.

These three competencies will help leaders only if they have built a foundation of integrity, courage, commitment, and passion because without these characteristics in the leader’s foundation, not much will help them become more effective, efficient, or successful.

I have been lucky enough to experience the full spectrum of leadership from the era of authoritative leadership, through the situational phase, to where we find ourselves today—in partnerships where collaboration and cooperation

have become increasingly necessary. To make partnerships successful, leaders must clearly understand and be comfortable with the roles they must play as leaders, managers, and followers.

The leaders must understand both the logical as well as the emotional elements of the enterprise and help to merge the heads and the hearts of the people, while tempering their leadership with practicality and reason. They must respect themselves and others and engage in collaborative relationships based on trust and integrity while playing whatever role necessary to exert power toward achieving the mutual goals of the organization and the people.

From the many definitions of leadership, management, and followership, I have chosen to use the following ones: leaders do the right things; managers influence the followers to do those right things efficiently; and followers do the work of the organization. Adams and Fenwick write that leadership is an interactive process that relies upon the leaders, managers, and followers to come together in common pursuit of the organization’s goals.¹ Leaders must understand that to be successful they must assume and be comfortable in each of these roles at any given time throughout the day. It is for this reason that they must know what role to be in, when they should be in it, and the characteristics of each role.

An example of this concept is that in the leader role you set direction, envision the future, and decide where the organization should be in the next few years. Followers need help from you and need for you to be in your management role, helping them do their job more efficiently or removing some type of barrier for them. If you find yourself in a leadership role, giving the follower the vision of the organization or setting direction will not help. Even assuming a follower role will not help the follower get the job done now and will hurt the organization over the long haul.

Another scenario would be that the follower is doing fine and you decide to come into the situation in a manager role, or worse, a micromanager role. When the follower is doing fine, the leader or follower role works very well. Often followers find an opportunity to display leadership and management skills. If the opportunity arises and those skills are overshadowed by leadership or micromanagement roles, their growth and motivation will be tremendously inhibited, and may cause some attitude problems.

Not knowing the role or assuming a role out of sequence and order can be disastrous to relationships and will assuredly inhibit performance. Leaders must learn the char-

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acteristics of each role and practice until they become second nature. If a leader is uncomfortable being in a specific role, it will become obvious and will be seen as phony or condescending. The leader's integrity and honesty will compensate for only a few mistakes in the area of a misapplication of the roles.

The complex web of human relationships, coupled with the rules and regulations of the organization and driven by the organization's need to be successful, creates a number of inconsistencies or paradoxes. Most problems caused by these inconsistencies don't have concrete solutions, so leaders must develop the capacity to understand them, develop the ability to function effectively, and entertain opposing ideas, all from the perspective of the roles of leader, manager, or follower.

Here are a few of the inconsistencies that have caused the greatest stress and discomfort in my career as well as in the careers of others:

- having to make a correct decision without complete information
- developing followers' abilities to perform and succeed as individuals while cooperating and working in teams toward achievement of organizational goals
- coping with sometime brutal business realities while preserving human values and dignity
- being totally aware of what is going on without micro-managing and looking over people's shoulders
- balancing dedication to work with responsibilities to the family
- caring for people and firing people; sometime they are one and the same
- creating rapport with people without seeming to play favorites
- creating a sense of urgency without creating undue anxiety and stress
- embracing risk-taking and rewarding effort while avoiding mistakes that could cripple the enterprise

By acknowledging that there will be inconsistencies in the organization, by knowing the organization, and by having rapport with people, leaders may be better able to anticipate where the inconsistencies will surface. If they can identify where they may surface, they can collaborate with the workforce or the unions to try to deal with them in the most effective and efficient way.

I used the "point of the sword" metaphor because in my mind the point is where the work is being accomplished. Where the work is being accomplished is the place to put as much of the resources as possible. Using that example, leaders must understand what role needs to be played and what work needs to be accomplished. As an example, if the profits are low, the point of the sword would be inserted in such a way as to enhance the profits. In this situation, the leadership role would be the most appropriate because there may be some critical decisions to be made in a hurry.

Another example may be the situation in which the organization is growing, sales are flourishing, and getting the products out the door to the customers is the critical success factor. The point of the sword would be the first-line supervisors, as they are directly in contact with the workforce. At this point, they become the thin line between success and failure and every ounce of organizational energy should be placed there.

Leaders must understand the needs of the organization and the role they must be playing to expertly drive the point of the sword into the situation to effect the desired outcome. Keep in mind, the sword can work only if it is kept sharp and it is used correctly and expertly. A dull instrument used improperly will cause more damage than if there were no intervention at all.

These three competencies come about through continual learning, maintaining situational awareness, taking care of ourselves physically and mentally, being committed to the enterprise, and having a driving passion to succeed.

Notes

1. C. C. Adams and A. J. Fenwick, *The Leadership Dance* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Adams-Fenwick Publishing Co., 1999).

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