Title:Leadership in a time of change

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Six years ago, in a forum on "Leadership in the Public Sector" in this journal (Fall 1986), Paul Lorentzen noted that "leadership has been a subject of continuing conceptualization, speculation, and illustration." Warren Master continues those musings in his introduction to this forum on total quality leadership.

While we intuitively recognize leaders whenever we meet them, it has never been easy to answer the question: what is leadership? The essence of leadership, W. Chan Kim and Renee A. Maubargue note in a recent Harvard Business Review article, "cannot be reduced to a series of personal attributes nor confined to a set of particular roles and activities."(1) In a thought-provoking piece, they recount several parables that show the essential qualities of leadership and the acts that define a leader: the ability to hear what is left unspoken, humility, commitment, the value of looking at reality from many vantage points, and the ability to create an organization that draws out the unique strengths of every member.

The need for such leadership was never more urgent. Our governments at all levels are overwhelmed by the day-to-day "administrivia" which prevent us from making major innovative changes. The perception is that our white collar environments are difficult to quantify and manage, yet these are the areas which could dramatically revolutionize our governments.

Our dilemma is that our customers' needs and expectations are expanding, while our resources to meet those demands are decreasing. As Rosabeth Moss Kanter stated in her book, When Giants Learn to Dance: "The new game brings

with it new challenges. The mad rush to improve performance and to pursue excellence has multiplied the number of demands on executives and managers. These demands come from every part of business and personal life, and they increasingly seem incompatible and impossible."(2) And how we, the practitioners and the theoreticians of administration, meet those challenges will determine how effective we are as a nation.

Leadership

Management is usually treated as a mechanical discipline--something one can learn from graduate studies, books, or journals. Leadership is treated as a mythical or etherial quality. In a test of synonyms, for example, the word most often associated with leadership is charisma. But I've reviewed the literature(3) and read interviews with award-winning executives. I've met with the heads of firms that have received the prestigious Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. And, for the last three years, I've participated in conferences cosponsored by the President's Council on Management Improvement (PCMI) and the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) and focused on the topic of leadership. I've found that there are things one can do, steps that can be taken right away to start a manager on the road to leadership. Here are several behavior commitments for a leader. All are common sense, but as Mark Twain said: "Common sense is that sense which is not that common."

James Kouzes and Barry Posner suggest that there are five fundamental practices that enable leaders to get extraordinary things done.(4) Leaders:

\* challenge the process;

\* inspire a shared vision;

\* enable others to act;

\* model the way; and

\* encourage the heart.

Let's discuss each in turn.

Challenge the Process

Leadership is an active, not a passive, process. Leaders are visible, committed, and knowledgeable; they often have a missionary zeal. When you look at what Motorola, Inc.--a 1988 Baldrige Award winner--has done for quality in the United States, it is not just fulfilling its obligations as an award winner. The leaders are trying to effect as much change as possible through their suppliers and through the government.

Motorola and other award winners have set aggressive targets for themselves. Their leaders have gone beyond incremental quality improvements (where 3, 4, or 5 percent per year improvement is considered acceptable) to looking at the possibility of making enormous gains in quality. In some areas, Motorola has documented gains of 68 percent per year.

Leaders of Baldrige Award companies have used clear, easily remembered values that can be communicated effectively. In some cases, they have printed those values on small cards as reminders to people. It is important that leaders not concoct a laundry list of improvement goals. The values have to provide a real focus. To accomplish its quality goals, Motorola concentrates on several key operational initiatives. At the top of the list is "six sigma quality" which is a statistical measure of variation from a desired result. Westinghouse (also a 1988 winner) has a regular, ongoing, internal system of measuring key aspects of a process called "pulse points." The purpose is to guarantee the custommer that the end result will meet stated requirements. At Marlow Industries, Inc., a 1991 Baldrige winner, all workers--from the CEO to hourly employee--have taken a voluntary " quality pledge. " It commits them to the same performance standard: "Do it right today, better tomorrow."

Enable Others to Act

The mechanism for continuous improvement is total involvement. Everyone in the organization must be involved in resolving and preventing problems. Total involvement requires a shift in management style that includes delegation of authority. Information about the organization (goals, performance levels, competitive pressures, etc.), knowledge of problem-solving methods, and recognition must accompany this delegated authority.

At Marlow Industries, the leadership fosters an environment that encourages all 160 employees to participate in the continuous improvement process through a flat organizational structure and a variety of participatory mechanisms. In 1990, 88 percent of all personnel participated on "action teams," which focus on attaining corporate and departmental goals, or on "employee effectiveness teams," which concentrate on preventing potential problems in specific work areas.

There is a great deal of empowerment of people among the award winners. At Zytec Corporation--another 1991 Baldrige winner--coordination and integration are the firm's hallmark. Working closely with customers, design and development of new products are carried out by interdepartmental teams, which are assigned to projects from start to finish. Teams are empowered to address all issues of supplies and processes, including critical parameters for measurement and control.

Model the Way

While managers appraise their subordinates, subordinates also appraise their managers. The test they use is a simple one: Does my leader practice what he or she preaches?

In the case of Motorola, the story goes that the CEO moved quality from last on the agenda to first. And when the quality discussion was over, he left. His attitude was that if quality is taken care of, if the customer is taken care of, the business will take care of itself.

After winning in 1988, Motorola told 3,600 of its larger suppliers that they too must be prepared to compete--or else. Over 200 refuseniks have been dropped. In 1990, then Westinghouse Chairman John Marous told all 90 corporate divisions to compete for the George Westinghouse Total Quality Awards, two new internal prizes modeled on the Baldrige Award--or explain to him in person why they couldn't.

Being a role model means paying attention to what you believe is important. It means showing others through your behavior that you live your values. Tom Peters, coauthor of in Search of Excellence, summarizes the point well when he says, "The only magic is brute consistence, persistence, and attention to detail."(5)

Encourage the Heart

Another indicator of excellence in leadership is recognition--for both individuals and teams. In Baldrige Award winning firms, there is often a central quality day or celebration that helps to reinforce the quality values within the company and gives credit at the levels where gains are being made.

Reward systems work best when performance can be measured accurately and objectively. Xerox, for instance, measures its performance in about 240 key areas of product, service, and business performance. The ultimate target set was the level of performance achieved by the world leader regardless of industry. So, for example, Xerox benchmarks itself against Cummins Engine in terms of daily production schedules, against L. L. Bean for improvements in distribution, and against American Express for expertise in billing. Similarly, Milliken and Company has benchmarked itself against some 400 competitors.

Conclusion

Some claim that there has never been a time when more and better leadership is required than today. Recent best-sellers focus on leadership and leaders. Still, the field lacks consensus about just what leadership is, how it differs from management, and whether it can be measured or developed. This article suggests that there is a pattern of behavior that people use to lead and to achieve extraordinary results.

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NOTES

(1.) Kim, W. Chan and Renee A. Mauborgne, "Parables of Leadership," Harvard Business Review, July-August 1992 (Vol. 70, No. 4), pg. 123. (2.) Kanter, Rosabeth Moss, When Giants Learn to Dance, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1981, pg. 20. (3.) See, for example, Cooper, Terry L. and N. Dale Wright, (eds.), Exemplary Public Administrators: Character and Leadership in Government, Jossey-Boss Publishers, San Francisco, 1992. (4.) Kouzes, James M. and Barry Z. Posner, The Leadership Challenge, Jossey-Boss Publishers, San Francisco, 1987. (5.) Peters, Tom J., "Developing Distinctive Skills." Presentation to the Executive Seminar in Corporate Excellence, Santa Clara University, February 13, 1985.

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