

The Leaders We Need

Frances Hesselbein

As this winter issue of *Leader to Leader* is being prepared for publication, we face an abrasive political campaign in a country divided and in the midst of war. By the time this issue is published, the campaigns will have ended and the country will know who its president will be, but the divisions will remain. Healing the wounds will be one of the challenges to leaders everywhere.

This is a time of testing for leaders as well as a time for a new kind of courage—the courage to lead in a time of great divisiveness. In an earlier issue of *Leader to Leader* (Number 20, Spring 2001) and on our Web site (www.l2li.org/leaderbooks/l2li/spring2001/fh.html) is a checklist for an organization's relevance and viability—*When the Roll Is Called in 2010*. Now is the time to develop our checklist for leaders of the future who embody the values, prin-



ciples, and philosophy needed to lead from the front, right into this turbulent future, in a world at war. Added to the leadership qualities we look for in every sector, the leader as a healer and a unifier ought to be high on our leadership checklist. Whether we are leading in a corporation, a government agency, or a social sector or nonprofit organization, we need to ask, What kind of leaders do our people deserve and require in these demanding times?

We need leaders who practice dispersed leadership, leaders at every level of the enterprise, so that we are relying not on *the* leader but on leaders dispersed across the organization—on ourselves. These are leaders who remember Peter Drucker's admonition, "They're not employees, they're people."

We need leaders who believe and embody in concept, language, and

action that leadership is a matter of how to be, not how to do, knowing in the end it is the quality and character of the leader that determines the performance, the results.

We need leaders who believe and demonstrate that the people of the organization are the organization's greatest asset—making that a reality, not a slogan. These are leaders who build the richly diverse organization with powerful representation at every level, on all teams, in all groups, on all boards, in all management, and in all visual materials. They realize that rapidly changing demographics present enormous opportunities.

We need leaders who help distill the concept and language of the mission—why the organization does what it does, its purpose, its reason for being. These leaders invest in building the mission-focused, values-based, demographics-driven organization, permeating the total organization with mission and values, and demonstrating the power of reflecting the many faces of our country.

We need leaders who communicate with the people of the organization, the customers of the organization, and the many publics we engage—always reflecting in our communications that "communication is not saying something, communication is being heard." Here

the act of distilling language is one of the most effective skills the leader of the future can perfect. One sentence, one paragraph, one page—connecting, helping, inspiring, being heard.

We need leaders who practice the art of listening, who practice Peter's

Perhaps most of all we need leaders who share successes widely while accepting responsibility for shortfalls and failures. These leaders take a tough measure of their own performance, aware that their language, behavior, and action are measured against their self-proclaimed values and principles.

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to include, not exclude.***
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"think first, speak last." Leaders who are healers and unifiers use listening to include, not exclude—building consensus, appreciating differences, finding common concepts, common language, common ground.

We need leaders who in their own lives try to find work-life balance and make work-life balance a reality in the lives of their people. If you think that this is a lovely ideal but not realistic in today's tough world, try comparing the productivity and morale of a workforce that is encouraged and supported in finding this rare work-life balance with those of a dispirited workforce where work-life balance is not a consideration and "take no prisoners" is a valued management style.

Tonight as I write this column I think of the difference in our society and the world since our last general election. September 11 had not yet changed our world. It was a different world, not a world at war. While the basic qualities of leaders that corporations, government agencies, and social sector organizations need remain constant, some of them may have new significance, may move up the list in importance because of our times and the new testing we face.

We are all challenged to lead in an era of discontinuity far greater than 10 or 20 years ago. So all of us try to be prescient in a rapidly changing world, as we try to peer into that future no one can describe with certainty. We try to describe the

world of the future—try "to see what is visible but not yet seen," as Peter Drucker says, against the backdrop of our times. Only then will we be able to describe the qualities of the leaders we will need in the years ahead.

Are there qualities needed now more than ever, whatever the organization, the sector, as we move into 2005–2010? I propose that this is a time for leaders of quality and character, leaders who live the values, who are healers and unifiers, who bring hope to the people and the work of the enterprise. Bringing hope, healing, and unity within the organization and beyond the walls are essential qualities our times require of our leaders of the future.

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