



Leadership: Reflection & Resolution

Article written by Darlene Richard for Snapshotz Online

A sociological study has great significance for leaders. Fifty people over the age of ninety-five were asked just one question: "If you could live your life over again, what would you do differently?"

It was an open-ended question, and these elderly people were allowed to respond in unstructured ways. There were many answers, however three answers constantly re-emerged and dominated the results of the study and I will share them later in this article (what a plot to keep you reading!)

If you search on Amazon Books for titles about leadership today, you will find an impressive choice of over 71,000 titles! It's a very complicated topic or so simple, common sense is the key ingredient to success. I opt for the second choice actually. As we reach the end of 2011, it's time to call to mind a few nuggets of truth.

As a leader or would-be leader, it used to be enough to count on vision, energy, leveraging your authority and pointing in "that" strategic direction. But over 25 years of quantifiable research (by Robert Goffee and Gareth Jones, Harvard Business School) proves differently. What actually separates managers and effective, inspirational leaders from those leaders in name only? Just four qualities:

1. Intuition
2. Selective weaknesses
3. Differentiation with purpose
4. Tough empathy/love

The researchers have learned that leaders need all four of these qualities to be truly inspirational. (They also uncovered four main myths about leaders that I will cover in the first article of the New Year.)

The key to solidify all of this is in something Ted Turner once shared with me (before he was a multi-millionaire many times over!). This is his, now famous statement, "If you want to know if you are a leader, turn around!"

Being a leader is not saying you are a leader, it's that people CHOOSE to follow you. This cannot be controlled or cajoled or forced by fear or gain, it is ultimately

how you know you are a leader - that people trust you enough and your insight to follow you. Let's look more closely at these mysterious qualities.

Intuition

Intuition always sounds a little airy-fairy to most of us, but actually to be intuitive is to use innate powers of understanding or realising something without conscious rational thought, analysis or effort. It's when something understood or realised becomes an "ah-hah". It's instinctive. The word comes from a Latin word meaning a perspective or view.

Intuition is not actually a common quality in people and seems to be a large component of common sense: observing, learning, categorising, analysing, comparing and quickly evaluating by "connecting dots that others just do not see."

Think of it as someone who looks at the night sky and sees lots of stars, compared with someone who uses a telescope and sees many more stars, but also can see individual stars individually plus constellations.

There are great benefits to be had with intuition. Leaders with this quality can gauge unexpressed feelings in those around them. They can judge in uncanny ways relationships that are working or not. This is obviously a very complex process and as anyone who has ever encountered it in someone or within themselves, the results are uncanny and impressive and a bit humbling when you stop to reflect.

Weaknesses

Now how can weakness fit into this no-fail formula? Exposing and admitting to a weakness is the foundation of trust for all of us. Yet beyond creating trust and a collaborative atmosphere, communicating a weakness also builds solidarity between those who are led and the leader they choose to follow.

When you share a weakness it is effective because it demonstrates to those who may have you high on a pedestal that you are also human and authentic. However, it is not "true confession of every weakness"; rather it is selectively revealing a true weakness that does not reflect on your ability to lead. If used well it can also distract from weakness you actually have.

So a weakness you could admit to could be that you're a workaholic. You can see how this is easy for others to relate to and though it IS ultimately negative it is also a positive. You could admit you get nervous before a speech (most are and identify with this) and then deliver your speech well.



You can see that a weakness that helps you relate, but does not reflect on the ultimate core aspects of your professional responsibilities, is the type of vulnerability to expose. You may actually be absent-minded, but that WOULD negatively impact on your professionalism (you can find administrative or technical help to shore up a weakness such as this). Any weakness you reveal must be genuine and believable.

Tough Love/Empathy

Probably this is one quality that's not well appreciated and surely misinterpreted. Tough empathy or tough love is about giving people what they need, not what they want.

What are the top motivators for all of us? Not what most of us think; they are achievement and recognition (money is the 11th most motivating, by the way). So providing those who follow with opportunities to use their skills and expertise to achieve meaningful goals and objectives (and including appropriate recognition of these achievements) moves hearts most effectively.

With achievement comes balance between respect for the individual and for the task at hand. For you as a leader it means you must demonstrate detached caring. It is very much like when you have children and you discipline them and say to them, "This will hurt me more than you," and it does!

Leaders must do things they do not want to do and it is tough to be tough. Yet we all know that people do not commit to leaders who merely do what is expected of them. They want more. They want someone to lead who cares passionately about people and the work - just as they do and someone with the responsibility and power to enforce quality.

Once you have the people "with you", you can make difficult decisions that need to be made and they will respect you more for doing this than if you pamper them. If you care deeply for your vision (a key task and joy for any leader) it makes it easier for you to display tough love with sensible measures and management of those measures. It clearly communicates authenticity, a pre-condition for leadership and shows others that you are doing more than just playing a role.

When I was starting up my business many years ago, I wanted to call it "Passion for Direct," because I know passion is what drives me every day. My business partners and advisors thought it sounded too much like a "1-900 number" (phone sex line) and so would not agree. (Always makes me laugh now that I think of how this IS

my differentiator - my passion for doing things well. It just has to be seen in other ways than the name of my business!)

Differentiation

As with branding and product or service creation, great advantage comes from being different. This used to be called our USP (unique selling point) and every truly inspirational and successful leader has their point(s) of differentiation.

In fact, using differences to great advantage is *the most important quality of the four mentioned*. The most effective and influential leaders deliberately use differences to keep a social distance, even though leaders are also balancing their weakness to draw followers close.

Some areas of differentiation that you may have (again all these qualities must be authentic or they will be seen through) are imagination, creativity, loyalty, expertise in an arcane area. They may be “visible” through something as seemingly trivial as wearing a bow tie, your handshake or special rituals or habits.

For some reason there is a perception that we should blend in so most people are hesitant to communicate what is unique about them. Effective, inspirational leaders use differentiation to motivate others to perform better. Why? Because people admire differences in their leaders and people will push themselves if their leader is just a little aloof, special or separate for whatever reason. Leadership is never a popularity contest!

Reflection

All four qualities are found in truly inspirational leaders. They must be authentic, realistic, believable and unique to be of value. Think of those you actually recognise as leaders and consider how they exhibit these qualities.

Now, I did not forget about those elders and the question of what would they do differently if they got the chance to live their lives over. Their answers were:

1. *I would REFLECT more.*
2. *I would RISK more.*
3. *I would do more things that would live on after I am gone.*

As you look over this last year (and what you’ve accomplished as a leader in your lifetime), think about the four qualities that are your secret power. Find ways to reflect on these and benefit from them.

I wish you and yours the most amazing holiday season and that 2012 provides you the discipline to take time to reflect, risk more and take care of your legacy.

Finally, I offer you one small personal gift for the holidays about “change”. It’s a ten-minute investment that will shift your thinking forever. Enjoy:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9DXL9vIUWg&list=PL5D9620ECEC460A9F&index=4&feature=plpp_video