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Effective Leadership in the 21st Century



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Keeping The Team Engaged

Leaders know how to achieve goals and inspire people along the way. While the terms and definitions may change with the times, Jacqueline Jones writes in Radiology Management, Journal of the AHRA, that it is important to understand the skills and abilities needed to lead in the 21st century.

Definition of Leadership

Leaders will each influence at least 250 people in their lifetimes (Kehler 2010). People influence others by what they say and do, and through how they do their work.

Webster defines leadership as the power or ability to lead other people. In the 1950s, Peter Drucker said, "Leadership is not magnetic personality that can just as well be a glib tongue. It is not 'making friends and influencing people,' that is flattery. Leadership is lifting a person's vision to higher sights, the raising of a person's performance to a higher standard, the building of a personality beyond its normal limitations" (Drucker 1993).

Unfortunately, leadership does not have a one-size-fits all definition. Every leader has ideas about what it means to be effective. Although the definitions may vary, the general attitudes remain the same, and that is leaders are people who know how to achieve goals and inspire people along the way (Helmrich 2015).

Leadership in Imaging

Many in the imaging industry know someone who is highly intelligent, highly skilled, and gets promoted into a leadership role only to fail at the job. Others may know someone with solid technical skills, but not extraordinary intellectual abilities who gets promoted into a similar position and is successful. A leader may be a CEO of an organisation or a first year employee who leads the team to success from behind the scenes. A leader may lead through official authority and power or through inspiration, persuasion, and personal connection. It is not just the formation of results that makes a great leader.

Most effective leaders have one element in common, and that is they are able to keep their teams engaged. If team members are not engaged, they may very well leave the organisation (Goleman 2004). The ability to lead effectively is based on a number of skills.

Communication

Leaders must fine-tune their communication skills. Good leaders tend to be excellent listeners and are able to listen actively and gather information. Sam Walton, Founder of Wal-Mart once said, "The key to success is to get out into the store and listen to what the associates have to say. Our best ideas come from clerks and stock-boys. It's terribly important for everyone to get involved" (Khad 2012).

Motivation

Inspiring others is a practice of an effective leader. Motivation is best done by example and guidance and not by giving orders. One of the primary goals of a leader is to attract and retain motivated employees. Effective leaders do not lead by telling people what they have to do. Instead, effective leaders are catalysts and they inspire the staff to want to help.

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Vision

Leaders are visionaries. Leadership pioneer and guru Warren Bennis said, "Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality."

Visionary leadership can act as a catalyst and provide the inspiration needed to spark the performance of others. It looks beyond the conventional role of a leader and embraces a forward thinking attitude and envisions the future (Farmer 2008).

Modelling

Modelling is the leader doing what he or she expects the workers to do. If team members are expected to speak respectfully to each other, the leader must speak respectfully to the team. "Do as I say, not as I do" does not work for adults any better than it works with children. If team members are expected to be on time for meetings, then the leader must always be there a few minutes ahead and begin exactly on time, every time, no exceptions.

Demonstrate Empathy

Empathy simply means understanding and compassion. Leadership does not require adopting staff emotions or trying to please everybody. Rather, it simply means to thoughtfully consider employees' feelings along with other factors in the process of making a decision. Empathetic leadership results in relationships where leaders truly understand their followers, and demonstrate concern for their wellbeing and growth (Wim 2011).

Confidence

Confidence is the cornerstone of leadership. Leaders can be taught problem solving skills as well as decision-making abilities. They can also be educated on how to become better communicators, coaches, mentors, and at holding team members accountable. Yet, without confidence, leadership will exist in title alone. Part of the job of the leader is to put out fires and maintain team morale. The leader has to maintain confidence and assure everyone that setbacks are natural. The important thing is to focus on the larger goal.

Know Your Strengths

Leaders must do their jobs on the basis of their strengths. In order to be a successful leader in the 21st century, leaders need all of their team members to reach their goals. Each employee has some of the vital skills needed to get there, but effective leaders must surround themselves with people to bridge any gaps.

Persistence

Great leaders must be persistent. Mother Teresa was determined. Margaret Thatcher was determined. Steve Jobs was persistent. He experimented with many pursuits before starting Apple Computers. The key to being a good leader is endurance and not quitting.

Integrity

Integrity is the core of everything that is successful. Tom Peters, noted co-author of *In Search of Excellence*, said: "There is no such thing as a minor lapse of integrity." Leaders cannot take a hiatus from integrity. Minor lapses in integrity set a tone of disrespect for people, products, systems, customers, distributors, and relationships and can readily become pervasive. Therefore, leaders must remain honest and truthful in their action (Dortch 1998).

Adding Value

Leaders add value to their organisations and employees by concentrating on activities that create actual value for the organisation. They add value through investing in what creates worth, whether it is people, systems, or equipment. While systems and equipment are important, it is essential that leaders first focus on the people. Without people, there are no operations.

Conclusion

Today, leaders are faced with many challenges in running organisations. Over the past 50 years the definitions, descriptions, expectations, and styles of leadership have evolved and will continue to do so. What was true concerning leadership in the past may no longer hold today, and what is true today may not be so in the future. Even so, leaders must be in tune with their teams and be willing to adjust with the times.

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