Personal Leadership

Effectiveness

A guide to help you think about your own personal leadership effectiveness

Taking time out of your busy schedule to sit down and really think about your personal leadership effectiveness is probably not something you get to do very often; if you are like most owners and managers, you probably feel that there are far more practical matters to worry about. Indeed, there are undoubtedly many pressing issues which require your attention every day, but there are none more critical than leadership; don't underestimate the strength of the correlation between strong leadership and business success.

Personal Leadership Effectiveness

This guide is designed to help you think about your own personal leadership effectiveness and covers the following content:

1. Introduction

The content in this particular guide focuses more upon who successful leaders are as individuals (their qualities) as opposed to what they do (their skills). After all, without the right personal qualities, skills are meaningless. However, you can also find additional support as to what effective leaders do in the 'Leadership Skills guide'.

To create a context for what is contained within this guide, it is worth briefly exploring the issue of how 'leadership' and 'management' relate to one another. There is much debate on this matter, but in a practical guide such as this, it is important to avoid overly theoretical analysis and focus on day-to-day implications. So, instead of thinking in terms like leadership or management, an easier way to look at this issue is to consider what you, or anybody holding a position of authority in your business, must do on a daily basis in order to be effective. Simply put, you must do two things:

Engage	Engage **People** to ensure their commitment, competence and motivation	**The 'leading' part**
Achieve	Harness that engagement by focusing on **Process** to ensure productivity, efficiency and quality, in order to achieve the **Performance** and results required.	**The 'managing' part**

" *you need to both lead and manage* "

To be successful, you therefore need to both lead *and* manage, for one without the other will lead to shortcomings of some kind. For example, if you only 'manage', then you may not be too concerned with your people and whilst the work might be done, it will not be done to the highest standard possible because people will not feel valued or appreciated which impacts on their performance. Equally, if you worry too much about the needs and feelings of your employees, you are in danger of trying to create a happiness camp at the expense of getting the job done.

Self-Awareness and Leadership Success

Self-awareness may not always get as much attention as some other leadership traits, but it is perhaps the most valuable in terms of raising performance and as such is worth considering separately. Being conscious of what you are good at, while accepting that you still have plenty to learn, pushes you to constantly raise the personal effectiveness bar. In terms of self-awareness, we can all learn a thing or two about self-analysis, and indeed humility, from former General Mills CEO Steve Sanger who reportedly once told a gathering of his colleagues that:

"As you all know, last year my team told me that I needed to do a better job of coaching my direct reports. I just reviewed my 360-degree feedback. I have been working on becoming a better coach for the past year or so. I'm still not doing quite as well as I want, but I'm getting a lot better. My co-workers have been helping me improve. Another thing that I feel good about is the fact that my scores on 'effectively responds to feedback' are so high this year."

Managers who have high levels of self-awareness are not only better off because of that fact, but it tells us something more elementary about them. It takes honesty and real courage to admit personal failings and then to do something about them; so those who can make that journey possess the strength of character not seen in others who know themselves less well. The best performers in any field are always very self-aware, a point that Abraham Maslow the renowned psychologist made well when he said, '**whereas the average individuals often have not the slightest idea of what they are, of what they want, of what their own opinions are, self- actualising individuals have superior awareness of their own impulses, desires, opinions, and subjective reactions in general'.**

When it comes to effective management, this assertion rings particularly true and to raise your own leadership effectiveness, it is vitally important that you understand what makes you tick, that you recognise your strengths and weaknesses and continuously work hard to build your capacity to lead. It is not only important that you understand your behavior but, more importantly, you should take proactive steps to manage it. It is this action orientation towards personal improvement, based on your understanding of self, which will really set you apart from other leaders. This guide will give you some food for thought as you reflect on 'who you are' as a leader.

2. Personal Leadership Effectiveness

There are many formal models and theories which seek to identify the key traits and behaviours that help leaders to succeed and whilst these are worthwhile, it is perhaps more useful to explore such traits in everyday terms. In doing so, it's vital to understand how traits and skills relate to one another. Certain skills are, of course, vital for leaders and these are addressed in a separate guide; however, without certain personal qualities, it is impossible for leaders to make the skills stick. For example, few would argue that communication skills are vital for managers, but if a leader does not have self-control, then no matter what communication skills they learn, they will not be able to apply them because as soon as they lose their temper all best practice will go out the window. It is for this reason that when considering personal leadership effectiveness you need to reflect upon who you are before considering what you do.

Leadership Traits and Behaviours

Here are – in no order of importance – ten factors which are proven to support effective leadership and it is the combined impact of these traits and behaviours which enable you to 'lead by example'. Successful leaders have some or all of the follow traits, or consistently display these behaviours.

① Energy & Enthusiasm

Some people are akin to energy vampires; they can suck the life out of you. Not so where effective leaders are concerned. They do the opposite and make you feel really energised and engaged simply by their upbeat and enthusiastic natures. They have real passion for what they do.

② Openness

A willingness to communicate is the life blood of effective management, simple as that. The best leaders want to communicate with their people: they believe in openness and, added to this, they have other personal qualities, such as self-awareness and self-control which help them communicate effectively.

③ Self-Motivation

First off, the best leaders constantly set the bar higher in terms of their own performance. They never settle for second best and are self-motivated and goal-orientated individuals; they expect the same of others too. That said, they are fair in how they demand that extra effort from those around them. But demand it they do.

④ Future-Oriented

Effective leaders are never 'headless chickens', nor are they spineless individuals who avoid difficult issues, sit on the fence or shift positions to suit whichever way the wind is blowing. No, the best managers have a clear idea of where they want the business to go - and those views are formed based on solid evidence, with a bit of intuition thrown in too for good measure. When that vision is clear, they flesh it out and modify it if necessary - with their senior people - until they feel certain it is the best way to go. Then they can win support throughout the business, or department, for that vision and later can translate those broad aspirations into meaningful goals, strategies and plans which serve to engage people and guide their actions.

⑤ Intelligent

The best leaders are smart characters, not always 'booky' smart though. Instead, they are individuals who benefit from having different forms of intelligence: the capacity to analyse and solve problems, knowledge related to the requirements of their job or an ability to be creative. They also always seem to have a fair helping of that critical, if somewhat intangible, commodity called common sense. They make decisions only when they have all the information at hand, and because they involve others in the decision-making process, they benefit from their wisdom and experience.

⑥ Open to Change

The best bosses are those who are not afraid to try different things. New is good, as far as they are concerned, if it means potentially achieving better results. Now, when it comes to finding new ways forward, the best leaders do not necessarily think that they have all the winning ideas, or that only they can spot important trends and changes. No, what distinguishes them in this regard is that, first, they are open to change – they embrace it in fact – and, second, they create an environment where ideas and suggestions are welcomed from many sources so the flow of creativity is encouraged throughout the business.

⑦ Inclusive

A lot of managers talk about inclusivity these days, but the reality does not always match the words where some are concerned. Seeing as effective leaders are confident and open characters – with real empathy for others – they like to include people in the running of the business, where appropriate of course. And they are never afraid to loosen the reins or delegate to others, if they believe that will deliver the best results. For sure, like all human beings, they prefer some people over others, but they treat all fairly and never take dislikes to people for no reason, nor do they allow cliques to form amongst their employees. They really do think in terms of teams. Everyone has a chance to participate and contribute.

⑧ Learn from mistakes

Of course, even the very best leaders are not immune from making mistakes. Sometimes you see top leaders being portrayed as infallible messiahs who never put a foot wrong. That's wishful thinking. Sure, the best leaders make fewer mistakes than others do, but that's largely due to the effective decision-making processes they follow in the first place; and when things do go awry, top leaders see those events as learning opportunities and move on. They do not make the same mistake twice.

⑨ Ethical

There have been many examples of business, and indeed other, leaders who have spectacularly fallen from grace in recent times and yes they all fell for different reasons, but a big factor in all their downfalls was that they each lost their moral compass – or maybe they never had one in the first place. In some cases not having such a compass can lead to greed taking precedence over ethics, or in other words 'self' starts to matter most. Lots of things go wrong when you lose sight of your ethics and it always leads to negative outcomes in the long run. The best leaders in any business, though, do have a moral compass and more importantly they follow it.

⑩ Self-Control

This is another important trait that all the best leaders possess. And it's vital because it helps them in so many aspects of leading and managing others. For starters, it allows them to think clearly, which helps in decision-making and that in turn results in fewer mistakes. It also helps them to act rationally, not emotionally, when faced with difficult people, so they can decide which leadership style is best to apply in any given situation.

This is not an exhaustive list but these 10 items are worth considering in terms of your own approach to leadership. It is only through working on developing qualities such as those listed above that you can lay the foundation to improve your performance as a leader.

3. Leadership and Relationships

One of the most important activities undertaken by any leader is relationship building, and in fact, it can be argued that everything you do as a leader involves building some form of relationship. In particular, relationships between you and your employees are vital considerations.

Of course, there are skills that you can learn to help you here but wanting to forge relationships with others, and understanding how that process can apply in a work context are useful pre-requisites.

A helpful tool to encourage you to think about this matter is something called the *Leader-Member Exchange Theory*. You may well have seen it at some point, and essentially it's a well-established and proven model which helps to explain how managers develop relationships with their employees and the consequences that can arise from such developments.

Leader-Member Exchange Theory

In a nutshell, the theory states that your relationship with each of your employees goes through three distinct phases:

1. Role-Taking
2. Role-Making
3. Routinisation

Briefly, here's what happens in each stage:

1. Role-Taking

When a new employee joins your team, you naturally take some time to assess their abilities, skills, motivation levels and so on. For a period, you are essentially weighing them up.

2. Role-Making

As they work as part of your team, you begin to form judgements about them and you (often subconsciously) group them into one of two categories:

Your In-Group – when, in your view, the employee shows themselves to be hardworking and effective, you naturally consider them in a favourable light and you start to trust them. Employees who end up in this group subsequently get more of your attention, are taken more into your confidence and generally have a closer working relationship with you.

Your Out-Group – where an employee fails to live up to **your** expectations (and that can often be through their own fault, or it can sometimes be down to you simply taking a dislike to them, perhaps for little or no reason), they end up in this group. Generally, for those who do end up in your Out-Group you spend little time trying to develop relationships with them – you may not be nasty towards them – but you certainly are distant and they are frequently overlooked for challenging work, or advancement in favour of those in your In-Group. So in effect they never get a chance to shine – they see this of course, which demotivates them and a sort of vicious circle sets in.

3. Routinisation

Once you make a decision about an employee, it is very hard for you, or them, to change that view and the relationship develops along a fairly predictable path after that. Both you and they come to act in defined ways towards each other as time passes. None of this may seem overly surprising, but it does have major implications for how you interact with your employees. In addition, two common effects - *The Pygmalion effect* and *The Golem effect* come into play here:

The Pygmalion effect is again a well-researched scenario which highlights that when you, as an authority figure, have high expectations of a subordinate this can of itself stimulate higher performance in the individual. The Golem effect on the other hand, states the opposite – namely that when you have low expectations of an employees this directly leads to a reduction in their performance.

When you have 'categorised' someone in your mind, as mentioned, that viewpoint becomes very hard to break and in a sense becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy because your attitude towards a particular employee contributes to that employee producing the results expected. For example, with someone in your Out-Group, you are likely to be very directive when allocating tasks, and then you are also more likely to proactively monitor their performance because you have low expectations of, and confidence in them, with the result being that over time the employee becomes almost robot-like and waits for direction from you. The effects are also

self-reinforcing because as you trust the employees in the Out-Group less over time, this creates further distance between you and them which in turn prevents trust from building.

Now forgetting about the theory of it all, when you sit down and think about it you may find that you doing more of this 'In-Out' grouping than you might imagine. And if you are, then you should also think about what you might do about it.

For sure, as mentioned, some employees may well deserve to be in your Out-Group, but some may be there not through their own fault, but due to the fact that you didn't give them a fair crack of the whip.

And what can you do about such individuals who ended up being unfairly lumped in your Out-Group?

Well, the first thing to do is to accept that it has happened; and that it's unfair to the individual(s) in question. Then, as with any 'inter-personal' blockage, you need to take steps to rebuild the relationship over time. The goal of these interactions should not be to assign blame but rather to identify steps that can be taken to help change the entrenched perceptions that now exist on both sides. Sure, it takes a lot of guts on your behalf to instigate such discussions, because in a sense you are accepting that you haven't been totally fair to the person, but if you see a better relationship building as a result and improved performance then it's worth the effort.

Activity 3: Take a moment now to reflect upon your current abilities in terms of building relationships at work.

Consider the following questions:

1. Do you give everyone a real chance to get to know you, or do you judge people very early in the relationship?

2. Do you allow adequate time and effort to understand and appreciate where 'others are coming from'?

3. Do you truly believe in collaborating with others, or do you see most interactions in terms of 'win-lose'?

4. Are you a good communicator in the sense that not only do you get your own point across but that you actively listen to others too?

5. What style of management do you mostly adopt? Would it best be described as 'participative' or 'directive' most of the time?

6. How many new (and productive) relationships have you formed at work over the past year? Do you have more (and better) relationships at work this year than you had last year, or has the situation deteriorated?

7. If there has been a deterioration in the number and/or quality of your relationships at work, why has this happened? How have you contributed to any relationship problems? Can you do anything to turn things around?

8. How good are you at recognising and sharing the success of others, or when you see others achieving more than you, do you become jealous and resentful?

9. How good are you at proactively helping colleagues when they need assistance, or do you ignore opportunities where you could be supportive?

10. Do you take a genuine interest in the lives of those you work with, or do you view work relationships as being 'strictly business'?

4. Conclusion

Having read this guide, you should now reflect upon how you might develop your personal traits to help you raise your effectiveness as a leader. There is no pretence that changing your personal qualities is an easy endeavour, but it is possible with the desire to do so and much hard work. There is a myth out there that you 'are who you are' at this stage in life and that such change is therefore impossible, but that mindset is the antithesis of how an effective leader should think. Everything is possible, but not easy.

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