How2 be an effective leader

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Introduction

This Byte looks at the basic competencies that are considered vital for effective leadership and how a leader can build loyalty and motivate others.

In particular this Byte covers the following key aspects and elements to succeed as a leader:

- Developing a vision

  With a competent, motivated staff, the leader is free to develop a working vision of the organisation's future.

- Knowing yourself

  Your actions must align harmoniously with specific values, behaviour and principles.

- Connecting with others

  Understand what makes your employees perform at their best and give them what they need to help the business succeed.

- Taking responsibility

  When your actions or decisions backfire, don't blame others. Size up the situation; determine realistic solutions and act on them.

- Communication

  Keep people informed about what's going on - the good news and the bad.

Main

STEP 1: **Build a vision**

A leader must be able to look unflinchingly at the realities of the organisation and marketplace. To "interrogate reality," a leader should ask:

- What values do we stand for? Is there a gap between the values we espouse and the way our business actually performs?
- Do the skills and talents we possess match the demands of the marketplace? If not, why?
- What opportunities are available to us in the future? Do we have the capacity to seize upon these opportunities?

The leader's vision must be both feasible and far-reaching. CEOs should build a vision by expanding their intellectual horizons. Get out of the office and explore the world around you. Attend leadership seminars. Visit with other CEOs in organisations.

Spend time with key customers. Find out what services and products they're waiting for someone to design in the future.

Leaders set the tone and pace for change. Their compelling agenda invigorates employees and, if successful, spills over to the customers as well.

STEP 2: **Leadership styles**

All organisational cultures reflect the personalities of their leaders. Every day, in hundreds of ways, the leader demonstrates to others what is suitable and unsuitable in the workplace.

The CEO for example must adopt a distinctive, passionate style of leadership. Nothing done conventionally by the CEO will offer any competitive advantage. Conventional thinking always and everywhere leads to conventional outcomes.

Great leaders make themselves visible. They infuse courage and trust in employees in a variety of ways:

Tell it like it is

The people who follow you deserve to know what's going on and will do a better job with the facts at hand.

Make change exciting

Build on short-term gains and lead employees through following cycles of change.

Take risks on people

Leaders always persuade people to do more, and to be more, than they ever thought possible.

STEP 3: **The art of communication**

It's essential to communicate at all levels of the organisation. No other single action is as crucial to winning employee trust and confidence.

Keep these principles in mind when communicating your vision:

Paint a picture

Use metaphors, analogies and specific examples to make your message more vivid.

Keep it simple

Avoid jargon or "techno-talk".

Repeat, repeat, repeat - people absorb ideas only after they've heard them repeated several times.

Confront uncertainty

Don't hesitate to discuss "glitches" or mid-course adjustments the organisation must work through. Let employees know that occasional setbacks are a normal part of the change process.

All forums, large and small

Take advantage of every opportunity to get your message across, through memos, e-mail and personal interactions.

In addition to "what" the change is, be sure to explain "why" the change is coming. Whenever possible, share the various options that were considered and rejected before a decision was made.

Another vital aspect of communication is active listening - listening with purpose. This means hearing a variety of messages, understanding their different meanings and confirming these meanings with significant feedback.

Keep in mind that the leader's physical presence can be intimidating to some employees. A good communicator neutralises this through some simple techniques:

- ○ Pay compliments

❍ Keep negative comments brief
❍ Take time to listen and explore the other's response. Respond, don't "react".

STEP 4: **Team building**

The first step in building a strong team is hiring the right people. Don't underestimate the long-term negative effects of the wrong hire. A bad hire wastes time and money, can collapse morale within the organisation and team and can damage customer relations.

With a strong team in place, leaders work to promote a community atmosphere. Follow these practices:

❍ Promote learning as an integral part of everyday work life.
❍ Treat people with respect.
❍ Ensure that team members understand the importance of their individual contributions.
❍ Work together as a team especially when things go wrong, identifying problems without blame.
❍ Give people access to accurate information, so they don't resort to rumours and hearsay.

Assigning important tasks to people that aren't part of their defined jobs can also be an effective motivational tool. Increasing the difficulty of the team's goals increases the challenge and effort necessary to achieve them and more difficult goals lead to enhanced team performance.

STEP 5: **Motivating others**

Long-term business success depends on having a corporate culture where people are motivated to excel. This originates directly from the leader's compelling agenda. High-performance organisations are "purpose-driven," while others just operate day by day.

With purpose comes new ideas and new ideas remain the most valuable commodity in our world of information-overload.

How can leaders harness their employees' creative energy? They can do it through:

❍ An inspiring mission
❍ A sense of urgency shared by all
❍ Goals that broaden employees' abilities
❍ A belief that teamwork can meet these goals.

Recognition and reward should follow outstanding achievement. People should be trained, encouraged and offered ample opportunity for advancement. It's not enough to say, "for a job well done." Specify the actions that culminated in a successful outcome.

STEP 6: **Decision making**

Regardless of decision-making style, I emphasise one point: Effective leaders use the decision-making process to free up resources that go to keeping things the way they are - particularly if these resources no longer produce results and don't contribute to enhanced performance.

Strong leaders scrutinise every element of the organisation - products, services, markets, and methods of distribution and value to the customer because the business depends on it. They decide which elements to preserve and which should be abandoned.

Certain conditions indicate when the right action is letting go:

❍ Products, services, markets or processes that still have "a few good years of life" usually require the greatest effort to maintain.
❍ Products, services, markets, etc. that are fully written off may generate some tax value, but the effective leader asks, "wouldn't we be better off without them?"

Sometimes the effort to maintain current products, services, etc. depletes energy and resources needed to develop new products and services.

STEP 7: **Delegating responsibility**

The best way to become comfortable with delegating responsibility is to surround yourself with the best people you can find. With a strong management in place, it's foolish, even self-destructive, not to take full advantage of their skills and authorities.

I offer these guidelines for delegating responsibility:

- Define the task. Don't tell people how to do the job; describe the results you want.
- Offer suggestions. Some individuals take the ball and run, while others are unsure about how to proceed. Offer helpful suggestions that enable them to perform at a higher level.
- Don't hover. Once you've assigned a task, give people room to operate and the freedom to be creative in their approach.
- Reward and recognise. Some people benefit from praise along the way, while others are more self-motivated. Everyone, however, responds well to sincere praise.

Effective leaders understand that there is more than one way to successfully complete a project. After delegating responsibility, they avoid questioning, analysing and second-guessing each decision made or action taken by the person they've placed in charge.

STEP 8: **Leaders building leaders**

One sure sign of effective leadership is the desire to instil leadership traits in your executive management team. CEOs committed to building the next generation of leaders develop and refine their own leadership skills while mentoring others to do the same.

What do true mentors do?

- Focus on a person's strengths and potential
- Convince a person that he or she has greatness within
- Put aside their own agendas to help others express their unique talents.

Mentoring offers benefits for the individual and the organisation alike. For the individual, mentoring provides:

- Enhanced people management skills
- The ability to set and achieve performance-stretching goals
- The confidence to lead others and serve as an advocate for change.

For the organisation, mentoring benefits include:

- Greater resources for accelerating company wide change
- Assistance in maintaining performance during times of transition
- Promotion of organisational stability during periods of restructuring.

In this new millennium, organisations will be obliged to constantly reinvent themselves.

The effective leader understands that instilling leadership traits in others is an essential part of making that reinvention successful.

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