

Leadership: The Way We've Always Done It?

We all have felt the effects of the changing world of work. Loss of overtime, reduced workweeks, and even layoffs continue to plague workers everywhere.

What does this have to do with leadership? Well, have you ever considered if leadership itself needs to change to meet these challenges? Do you think that when economy gets back on its feet, that leaders can go back to exercising leadership the way we've always done it? If so, you need to think again. Whatever your experiences in the past: leadership style must change, too.

It may surprise you to learn that the number one concern among leaders today is that they lack the necessary skills to lead. Why is that? Partly, because when old leadership styles are used, people don't respond the way they once did. That means that leaders can no longer assume that just because they've been put into a leadership position that people will automatically follow them.

Of course, the best followers are those who can't wait to do so. Whatever the leader does, his or her followers want to be there. Those things that are important to the leader, are important to them. They want to emulate what he or she does. In these cases, it's usually the charisma of the person that causes others to follow. They will do almost anything for that person. Cults thrive on this; and short of being "rescued," followers in these groups tend to stay until the bitter end.

At work, however, leaders shouldn't rely on the force of their personalities to get people to follow. Charisma overrides reason for the most part. It can pump up the fanatics, but not those on the fence; and it won't wash with people who are used to thinking for themselves. Therefore, it's all the more surprising when leaders mistreat the people they expect to follow them. Somehow, they fail to realize that, unless their followers are part of the fanatic faithful, or are forced to "follow," there's no reason why anyone would. This is especially true for those who are in the habit of verbally or emotionally humiliating, abusing, or otherwise denigrating them in front of their peers or even privately.

And this is the rub. Leadership in the past was "effective" because the people who worked for them expected to be there for their entire 30 or 40 year career. Changing jobs more than a couple of times in career used to raise red flags about dependability. People followed because they wanted to get on in the company. They wanted to be promoted so they could be paid more. The system worked reasonably well until the Nashua Corporation told their employees in the mid-1980s that they couldn't guarantee anyone a job for life anymore. So, why would anyone follow a "leader" who in the same breath said, "Well, of course, we can't offer you a career with us."

So, how do your different styles of leadership stack up? Are you planning to lead people the same way after the recession as you did before it? Are you expecting the same results from your style of leadership as you have always had?

The Web has made the world of work a much smaller place. Those who have a good experience in a company will tell their friends. Those who have a bad experience will blog about it or even name names in LinkedIn or on other social media sites.

Leaders today need to adapt their leadership style to fit the needs of the new workforce. Company growth and the retention of talent depends upon it.

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