

LEADERSHIP AUTOMATICALLY ALIGNS WITH THE ORGANIZATIONAL CHART – FACT OR FICTION?

By Tracy M. McIlrath

Dwight D. Eisenhower once said, “**You do not lead by hitting people over the head – that’s assault, not leadership.**” While I haven’t seen too many workers compensation claims crawling out of the boardroom lately, I have seen a lot of tyrants wielding their perspectives, interests and influence like a proverbial club. Regardless of the nameplate on their doors, these people are not leaders.

There has been much discussion in recent years about **what constitutes a leader** (vs. a boss or someone else with positional authority). James MacGregor Burns, one of the founding fathers of modern leadership study, has long asserted that the only truly legitimate acts of leaders are those that “ultimately in some way help to release human potentials now locked in ungratified needs and crushed expectations.” How many folks studied that in Management 101?

Very often talented, experienced individuals are promoted up through the ranks based on their skills and performance. This is good – right? The problem lies in the fact that these people no longer depend on the skills and experience that got them the promotion. They now need managerial skills (supervision, planning, process development) and also leadership skills (establishment of a long term vision, intrinsic motivation of their team, collaboration eloquence, symbiotic employee/departmental development, etc.).



Leadership skills are what bring completeness to a job rather than just a shallow execution of steps or functions. True leadership creates an atmosphere of integration. A true leader is present with his/her team in embracing a common vision. They recognize the necessity in developing the skills, confidence and functional grace of individuals to the benefit of the team, department and organization. Leaders do not sit at the back shouting orders – instead they are appropriately participative, recognizing that front line individuals have fresh perspectives and wisdom borne of experience and proximity. They are confident enough in their own vision and ability to welcome the perspectives and talents of others. They remember that if people could complete the task by themselves, then current organizational structures would not be in place - the efforts and intentions of many diverse people are necessary.

"The task of leadership is not to put greatness into people, but to elicit it, for the greatness is there already."
— John Buchan

So what's the point? Many individuals with positional authority are lacking in good managerial skills and have no concept of leadership skills and their value. Good leadership is what breeds employee and client retention, growth, sustainability and job satisfaction. Surprisingly, most organizations don't retain a fairy godmother just waiting to bestow people with insight, compassion, wisdom or vision following a promotion.

Leadership skills are learned and nurtured – they aren't side dishes to any particular job title. It is unfair to both employees and those with positional authority to assume someone is in command of leadership skills and talent based on seniority.

We need a shift in our definition and expectation of "leaders". A "leader" is not a job title or position. Instead a leader is a person who embodies Burns' "relationship of

mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents.”

Manager is not synonymous with leader. Power-wielder is not synonymous with leader. Coercion, manipulation and authoritarianism are not leadership. Employees and constituents are becoming more sophisticated in their expectations of those who claim the leadership mantle. It is imperative for wise organizations to realize the people in charge are not getting their daily dose of leadership-juice from the coffee in the executive break room. Executives, managers and supervisors all need training and support in what it means to truly lead in today’s world.

Successful organizations recognize this and are becoming proactive in their training and support efforts. Organizations not keeping pace will soon be scratching their heads at employee losses and will be left in a reactionary scramble to pick up the pieces. Firms committed to sustainability are examining the effectiveness of their current leadership structures and assumptions. They are training both executive and staff level employees in the principles and payoffs of Servant Leadership, improved communication techniques and are fostering a more integral perspective of their corporate structure.

Remaining competitive in today’s world market requires organizations to discard structures and attitudes that are no longer appropriate or effective. Leadership is the realm and responsibility at most levels now, not just the gilded stars at the top of the org-chart.

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