

The Qualities of Leadership: Integrity, Honesty and Values

What defines leadership? Executives ask this question every time they choose a new leader or train their current leaders.

In order to be truly effective, there are five critical qualities that a leader must have. A leader must be a Visionary; A leader must be a person of Integrity and Honesty and have Values; A leader must know how to properly motivate others; and A leader must be able to lead change and finally, A leader must be able to lead a culture of change.

While each role is unique, they are also interdependent. In this series of articles, we will explore these leadership roles-what they are and how to hone your skills for each role.

The Importance of Integrity, Honesty and Values

Trust is an inherent part of leadership. Team members have to trust that leadership is serving everyone's best interest and leadership has to trust that team members are fulfilling their responsibilities. It is, therefore, imperative that leaders lead with integrity, honesty and values. By taking on this role, leaders invoke trust and respect from their team.

Determining Personal Values

While it may seem odd to discuss your personal values, it will lead to increased respect and trust in your organization. Team members need leaders who are consistent and act predictably. By behaving according to your values, your

team will have a better appreciation for how you make decisions. You will also be able to provide a framework for your team to utilize when they are making their own work decisions.

The process of determining your values may not be as easy as it first appears. The first step is to examine which values are MOST important to you. These may pertain to how you feel people ought to conduct business (teamwork, work ethic, etc) or it may involve concepts and ideas to which you personally attach importance (innovation, rapid response, the customer, etc).

If you have problems prioritizing your values, try a brainstorming session. Write down as many of your values as possible in five minutes. Then go back through and rank your values, choosing the top three to five as your focus.



After you have decided your top values, the next step is to determine exactly what those values mean to you. It is not enough to merely tell your team your values; you must also give them your measures of those values. For example, don't just say "I value teamwork", offer guidelines on how teamwork can be

demonstrated such as no politics, be honest, don't go behind backs, and offer assistance when time allows. These specific measures help clearly define what teamwork means to you, leaving no room for confusion or misinterpretation.

The Values Conversation™

Now that you have clearly deciphered your values, the next step is communicating them to your team. It is time for you to have The Values Conversation™.

Here are some tips for communicating your values:

Emphasize how your values will impact the Organization.

You must give your team the bigger picture so they can see a direct connection between your value and the effect it has on the organization. For example: "I value honesty because it will assist the organization in more accurate and less misleading communication."

Emphasize that you will make decisions according to these values.

This is especially important because it gives your team a guide for your behavior. This way they can predict that the decisions you make will be based on your prioritized set of values and adjust their behaviors accordingly.

Give Brief Examples of the Meaning of the Values.

Do not merely recite the definitions you devised for each value. The definitions will be easier to understand if you can illustrate them with an antidote, example or story.

Stress Your Expectations.

At this point, stress that you expect certain standards based on your values.

This way they are able to understand the direct connection between your values and their job tasks.

Ensure Understanding.

In most cases, it is not enough to simply ask if your team understood your values. Ask them to paraphrase what you have just told them. This way you can straighten out any confusion before these ideas are entrenched.

Even if you have many years supervising the same team, it is never too late to have The Values Conversation™. One common mistake leaders make is to have this conversation once and let the significance die by never connecting to it again.

Not to say that you should give your values speech over and over again. Try using everyday opportunities to reinforce your values by explaining the decisions you make and how they relate to your values. The more frequently you communicate your values, the more ingrained they will become in your team's minds. The most effective way to keep your values relevant and meaningful is to model your behavior to fit your values consistently.

Integrity

A study on employee trust found that the best way to build employee trust is to maintain integrity. Sounds easy enough, but what exactly does this mean? What is integrity and how do we maintain it?

Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary defines integrity as firm adherence to a code of values or the quality or state of being complete or undivided. How does this translate to the business world? Leadership experts Dr. Gay Hendricks and Dr. Kate Ludeman cite in their book

The Corporate Mystic, "the mastery of integrity comes down to three things: being authentic with yourself, being authentic with others, and doing the things you have said you would do." (The Corporate Mystic: A Guidebook for Visionaries with their Feet on the Ground, 1996, Bantam Books)

Authenticity

How does one maintain authenticity? In a word, self-awareness. You must know what you want out of life, who you are, what you feel, what your positive characteristics are and your negative qualities. You can't be true to yourself as a supervisor or leader if you don't have a clear sense of who you are as a person.

It is also important to be able to accept feedback about your behaviors and actions. You can learn a lot about how you are perceived in the world by listening to their feedback whether it is positive or negative. Lastly, by behaving consistently with your values, you will reinforce their importance and impact with yourself. This way you do not lose sight of what is really important to you.

Keeping Commitments

A commitment is anything you have agreed to do or that you have agreed not to do. You build trust and respect with your team and peers if when you keep your commitments. In fact, keeping your commitments is so essential to building trust, you should always try to go out of your way to keep the commitments you make. In a perfect world, we would never have to break a commitment. But, in life obstacles and challenges beyond our

control sometimes force us to break our commitments. Here are some steps to take in those situations where you will not be able to meet a commitment:

For a commitment that needs to be changed but not broken:

1. State the problem.
2. Listen openly to the reaction.
3. Get involvement from the person to solve the problem.
4. Reach a new commitment.

For a commitment you absolutely have to break:

1. Take ownership of the commitment.
2. Show empathy.
3. Explain rationale.
4. Listen openly to reaction.
5. Offer an alternative solution.

Having to break or alter a commitment is never comfortable, but following an effective procedure and maintaining open communication will help prevent anyone from feeling jilted. This method may take a little more time and effort, but in the long run, your team will still trust and respect you, even if you do occasionally have to go back on your word.

Integrity, Honesty and Values

Maintaining integrity, honesty and values as you lead will set the tone for establishing those qualities within your organization. When the relationships within your organizations are built on the trust that comes from these values, you can be sure that your team will be following a common path to reach a common goal.