The Factors, Principles, and Signs of a True Leader

Gayle W. Griggs

Nova Southeastern University

Cluster 32

Assignment 3

January 20, 2004
Introduction

The relationship between leaders and employees is instrumental in the success of a business. Supervisors who mindfully employ the factors and principles of leadership when interacting with employees have a greater potential of preserving and advancing their standing within a business. Supervisors who neglect or ridicule the factors and principles of leadership are most likely to lose their power, and fail as leaders.

The factors and principles practiced by leaders have been studied extensively. It is this researcher’s intention to reveal the features and attributes of a true leader, present her perspectives on successful leaders’ traits, and illustrate them with reference to the workplace.

Factors of Leadership

According to Clark (1997), there are four factors of leadership. These are the leader, the follower, the situation, and communication. Each of these factors plays an essential role in successful leadership. Failing to recognize, understand, and carefully consider these factors and their complexities will ultimately contribute to the failure of a leader, and perhaps, an entire organization.

The Leader

Clark (1997) stressed the need for a leader to “be, know, and do” (Factors of Leadership, ¶ 1). The researcher interprets this as a leader having the intelligence, knowledge, and selflessness to be a leader, knowing how to relate with others industriously, and performing the task of leading efficiently. Clark emphasized that leaders must recognize and learn how to lead. This is achieved by “continually working and studying to improve their leadership skills” (Introduction, ¶ 2). Above all, a leader must strive to gain knowledge, and live an honorable, trustworthy, ethical, selfless, inspirational, and dynamic life. These qualities contribute to the
followers’ acceptance and respect for their leader.

*The Follower*

Although a leader may possess positive attributes, a leader cannot lead without followers. Therefore, a supervisor must acknowledge, relate to, and appreciate followers for the qualities they possess, and their potential within an enterprise. A leader who esteems employees’ attributes, and appreciates each individual’s intricacies, recognizes the value each has to offer.

Diverse persons require diverse styles of leadership. As Clark (1997) stated, leaders who are attuned to persons’ particular “needs, emotions, and motivation” are more likely to help that person reach his fullest potential, and achieve his respect (Factors of Leadership, ¶ 1). Clark noted that leaders must know not only their own, but also their “employees’ *be, know, and do* attributes” (¶ 1). Acknowledging a person’s being, knowledge, and capabilities will most likely earn the follower’s commitment to a leader.

*Communication*

A leader should be able to articulate, and communicate verbally and non-verbally with the employees. The power of a leader is conveyed in his spoken and unspoken words. As Clark (1997) stressed, a leader must not only preach, but also practice. This is done through being an example to the employees, and demonstrating that the person in charge is willing to do everything that he expects others to do (Factors of Leadership, ¶ 3).

Although the concept of saying and doing, or “walking the talk,” is easy enough to understand, the researcher considers this communication as one that is commonly neglected. Leaders tend to delegate. At times, they delegate what they have neither the desire, nor the intention of carrying out themselves. Employees who detect a leader’s lackadaisical attitude towards a project, will in most probability, be resistant to carrying out the assignment. Only
when a supervisor sets the example, and fully involves himself in a task, will the subordinate willingly follow.

Situation

The means by which an authority suitably handles a situation, and does so at the opportune time, will determine the leader’s success at leading. Clark (1997) emphasized the need to analyze individual incidents before exercising one’s judgment. Each incident requires a distinctive “course of action and . . . leadership style” in order to be viable (Factors of Leadership, ¶ 4). If a leader ignores the prompts that unfold in his environment, or reacts too suddenly to them, an employee will question his judgment and leadership capabilities.

The manner in which a leader evaluates a particular situation, accepts employees’ feedback, and assesses which direction to take, will determine an outcome’s effectiveness. Rash, rushed, and raged decisions may most definitely be met with extreme ridicule or disrespect. It is important for leaders to welcome employees’ feedback, and cautiously use insight when determining the proper course of action.

If an authority leads without the support of his subordinates, he has not established a working team. This person cannot rely on just a handful of supporters, nor should he provide favors and incentives to coerce them. Inciting guilt and placing culpability on the employees will not aid in accomplishing a job. A leader must assume total responsibility and liability in all situations. True leaders admit their faults, and tribute success to their teams.

The factors of leadership embrace the leader, the follower, communication, and the situation. Leaders who consider each factor carefully will gain considerably from the outcome.

The researcher finds that some leaders in her academic community neglect to connect the four factors of leadership. Many times, subordinates are appointed to tasks based on their
associations with others, rather than their capabilities. The desired outcome is severely impeded, and many times, the leaders admonish others for what is their own fault. The consequence of this is internal resistance, conflict, and disorder. The union of all factors, and the unity of a leader with his group, will promote the welfare of a successful enterprise.

The Principles of Leadership

Clark (1997) pointed out that there are 11 principles of leadership in guiding the conduct and action of successful leaders. Each one of the principles is instrumental in achieving the most successful results with subordinates, and enhancing the capabilities of a leader. These principles “have long been the foundation of military leadership doctrine. . . . Most leadership mistakes resulted simply from the failure to apply these principles properly (“Principles and Leadership,” 2002, p. 21).

Know Yourself and Seek Self-Improvement

Clark (1997) pointed out that the first principle a leader should possess is to “know yourself and seek self-improvement” (Principles of Leadership, ¶ 1). He asserted that to know oneself, one must understand one’s “be, know, and do, attributes” (¶ 1).

One is what one produces. An individual progresses with self-evaluation, expansion of knowledge, and strength of character. Fortifying one’s strengths, and conquering one’s weaknesses are crucial to achieving self-improvement. Many times, persons are not even aware of their weaknesses until they become leaders, and are accountable for resolving complex situations. Sometimes, leaders deny their weaknesses, and blame others for their faults. A genuine leader knows his self, accepts his faults, and seeks self-improvement.

Be Technically Proficient

Authorities must display a wide range of proficiency in order to be deemed qualified
leaders. This proficiency encompasses not only the leader’s task performance, but also his expertise in the employees’ labors. A broad range of technical proficiency demonstrates an observant, organized, rational, and wise leader. A leader acquires proficiency through seeking out “associations with capable leaders,” applying and expanding his knowledge and techniques, and having the disposition to take on additional duties (“Principles and Leadership,” 2002, p. 23).

Seek Responsibility and Take Responsibility for Your Actions

A leader who knows himself adheres to his convictions, exercises technical proficiency, and seeks more responsibility to enhance his skills. Accepting responsibility for one’s actions, and constructively responding to criticism will ensure a leader’s competency, and promote his advancement.

Too often, authorities place the blame on others. This practice is detrimental to the unity of an organization, and hinders its progress. The leader must recognize that he is responsible for the actions of his subordinates, and influences the result of their endeavors.

Make Sound and Timely Decisions

Decisions require a plan of action that includes the participation of the followers, evaluates and contemplates the consequences of the action, and utilizes time efficiently and effectively to carry out the action. With this strategy, the leader has thoroughly analyzed a situation and is more likely to achieve successful results.

In many cases, a leader’s failure to communicate and discuss issues with subordinates before making a decision can be construed as arrogant and authoritarian. When an employee is faced with no options, he feels restricted, and may become less receptive to the decisions made. This may limit a person’s capabilities, and instill in the person a sense of worthlessness.
Set the Example

Authority figures must not only demand optimal performance from the subordinates, but also from themselves. As Clark (1997) explained, a leader must be “a role model” to the employees (Principles of Leadership, ¶ 1). What a leader expects from subordinates is what a leader should demonstrate to subordinates. A supervisor’s physical appearance, emotional behavior, supportive manner, inspiration, loyalty, morality, competence, conviction, and entrustment of responsibility are powerful leadership indicators. These attributes exemplify one’s commitment, and serve as a model to subordinates (“Principles and Leadership,” 2002, p. 24-25).

Know Your People and Look Out for Their Well-Being

Not only knowing employees’ by their names, but also caring for their “interests, values, and attitudes” will contribute to the employees’ respect and trust in a leader (“Principles and Leadership,” 2002, p. 25). By being personable, understanding, supportive, impartial, and participatory, leaders will likely welcome collaboration and accomplish their goals (p.26).

Keep Your People Informed

Communication is the key. Leadership qualities such as keeping employees informed, and explaining the reasons for decisions, “not only helps them to execute orders, it encourages initiative, improves teamwork, and enhances morale” (“Principles and Leadership,” 2002, p. 27).

Develop a Sense of Responsibility in Your People

When appropriate, delegating responsibility develops an employee’s sense of accountability and commitment towards a task. When leaders assign tasks to subordinates, they are demonstrating their faith and reliance in the employees. Allowing employees to exercise their potential, accept responsibility for their tasks, and carry out their work in the manner they judge most appropriate, gives employees the self-determination to accomplish their job successfully.
Although some employees require more guidance than others, a competent supervisor will be able to perceive the idiosyncratic needs and traits of each of his subordinates, and apply them suitably in the workplace.

Ensure that Tasks are Understood, Supervised, and Accomplished

Again, communication is the key. When delegating tasks, it is imperative that the employees fully understand “what you want done, what the standard is, and when you want it done” (“Principles and Leadership,” 2002, p. 28). Assigning duties based on an employee’s qualifications, explaining tasks clearly and concisely, clarifying doubts, supervising and attending to details, correcting errors immediately, and being available during task performance, will increase the chances of success in any undertaking.

Train Your People as a Team

Each individual has something significant to contribute in a team. Recognizing the power of the subordinates and their individual roles develops a sense of camaraderie within the team. Leaders who entrust team members with distinct and significant tasks exhibit the recognition, trust and confidence their employees merit.

Use the Full Capabilities of Your Organization

A leader must know the capabilities and the limitations of the team members. A leader’s sound judgment, delegation of reasonable yet challenging tasks, continuous observations, and constant accessibility during the task, will guarantee his thoroughness, and the follower’s confidence.

The 11 principles of leadership are crucial for a leader to achieve the trust, respect, following, and dedication of others. These principles are regarded and followed by responsible and conscientious leaders. If the principles are not contemplated closely, ethically, continuously,
and sincerely, the result will be damaging to an organization.

The relationship between leaders and followers is ultimate in the determination of an organization’s success. A self-absorbed, individualistic leader that considers his self over all others will no doubt fail at leadership, and lead the organization to disarray. The success of the leader is determined by the means in which he positively influences, motivates, and promotes growth among the employees. In order to meaningfully follow, a follower must desire to follow. If leaders fail to achieve the support of their subordinates, followers will simply do their jobs with no vision of a positive future, and no interest in the organization’s success.

Energy

Nelson (1999) stressed that every organization has energy. This energy depends wholly on the motivation of the employees (p. 265). Nelson listed five criteria, or “the five I’s” to maintaining an employee’s energy in the workplace (p. 272).

Interesting Work

The first “I” listed by Nelson (1999) is the need employees have for “Interesting Work” (p. 272). He quoted Herzberg when he stated: “If you want someone to do a good job, give them a good job to do” (p. 272). Human beings want to enjoy their work, and feel useful and fulfilled at their job. If so, they will be motivated to continue working at their finest potential. If not, they lose that essential motivation and energy to work.

Information

Another important “I” listed by Nelson (1999) in achieving energy in the workplace is “Information” (p. 272). If the channels of communication between leaders and followers are open, honest, and available, employees feel satisfied with their roles in a project. If the communication is sporadic, divided, and indirect, then the energy is negatively affected.
The Factors, Principles and Signs

Involvement

The third criterion listed by Nelson (1999) in achieving employee energy is “Involvement” (p. 272). He emphasized the need for employee involvement in decision making based on the fact that the employee may be directly affected by the decisions that are made, and many times has more “insight as to what to do about” a particular problem (p. 272). Providing the employee with active participation in the solution of a problem will contribute to the employee’s commitment to successfully carrying out the plan.

Independence

The fourth “I” listed by Nelson (1999) is “Independence” (p. 272). If employees are given the independence and “flexibility” to carry out their labors in “the way they see fit,” (p. 272) they are more likely to contribute to the success of a venture, and have a sense of satisfaction that can potentially increase constructive performance.

Increased Visibility

The final “I” revealed by Nelson (1999) is “Increased Visibility” (p. 272). Acknowledging an employee’s worth, and sharing it with his peers contributes to the inner motivation of an employee and also provides him with “new opportunities to perform, learn, and grow” (p. 272).

Leadership in the Academe

As with any organization, followers look to their leaders for guidance and enlightenment. Leadership in the academe is no different. Recently, the failure of college presidents has been under examination. For example, Boston University named former NASA chief, Daniel S. Goldin as president of the university effective November 1, 2003. But, according to Bartlett (2003), just one day short of the appointment, the trustees backed out of their offer, and awarded
Goldin “$1.8 million for leaving a job he never started, the trustees rid themselves of a leader in whom they had lost confidence, and everyone promised not to discuss the dispute again” (p. A1). Consequently, Aram V. Chobanian, professor of Medicine and Pharmacology, was named ad interim president until a new president is chosen.

The source of the conflict between Goldin and the board of trustees stemmed from a lack of trust between them. Goldin “was reportedly concerned about possible conflicts of interest between the university and trustees who do business with it. Many trustees, for their part, were reportedly concerned that Mr. Goldin planned to fire nearly all of the university’s top administrators” (p. A1). This suspicion between Goldin and the trustees resulted in the downfall of Goldin, although he was able to profit considerably from his termination. In retrospect, the university admits that insufficient time was spent in determining the details of Goldin’s presidency plans.

In analyzing the failure of appointing Goldin as president of Boston University, the factors and principles of leadership are placed into perspective. Leaders must prove themselves to their subordinates and their superiors as well. The decision to hire a new president is one that should be done thoroughly, analytically, and with careful consideration for the welfare of the employees.

*Cultural Misfit*

According to Bornstein (2003), there exists “six leading threats to the legitimacy of a sitting president (p. B20). The first, Bornstein labeled as “cultural misfit” and explained that new leaders must not try “to initiate change without first embracing the institution’s culture, demonstrating an appreciation for what had been achieved before his arrival, and gathering support for his initiatives” (p. B20). This idea coincides with the principle of knowing the people
and the institution, and looking out for their well-being. Acknowledging and respecting the value of the employees, and their roles within an institution demonstrates a genuine interest in the welfare of its most important resource.

*Managerial Incompetence*

Another threat listed by Bornstein (2003) is “managerial incompetence” (p. B20). Too often, incompetent persons with unrealistic visions are placed in supervisory positions they simply cannot handle. This falls into the principles that stress technical proficiency, knowledge and concern for employees, and recognizing the capabilities of an organization. A leader that does not fully examine and evaluate his capabilities is unable to build upon his strengths, and overcome his weaknesses. This lack of concern for self-improvement does not follow the principles of leadership, and certainly will not aid in assessing the needs of an organization or capitalizing on any of its valuable resources.

*Erosion of Social Capital*

The next threat listed by Bornstein (2003) is “erosion of social capital” (p. B20). Bornstein stressed, “Relationships of trust, cooperation, and mutual influence are essential for a successful presidency” (p. B20). People are a business’s main asset; a leader who develops a sense of responsibility in the people, and sets the example for them to follow, will be building their trust, confidence and motivation.

*Inattentiveness*

Bornstein (2003) argued that too many times, presidents busy themselves with civic and board related affairs, and "state- and federal-policy initiatives. . . . Such involvements can distract from the day-to-day management of a college, leaving decisions unmade, finances uncontrolled, administrators unsupervised, and campus needs ignored" (p. B20). By neglecting
the daily needs of an organization, a leader is not able to supervise employees, communicate
effectively with them, or develop and supervise working teams within a system. This neglect for
the employees is sure to have a negative effect on the institution.

*Grandiosity*

Bornstein (2003) believed that officials who have held their offices for extensive periods
of time, may determine that their experience has reached such a level that they no longer need to
follow the “traditional processes of shared governance and consultation” (p. B20). These
officials commonly have the full support of the trustees based on length of tenure, and are
assumed capable of acting wisely in any situation. This faith and freedom given to a leader
provides the leader with a free reign, and not only can it stimulate feelings of grandiosity, but
also trigger hasty decisions. Although leaders do take risks, high-stake risks can be detrimental.
A leader should never neglect to follow the proper procedure when making substantial decisions,
no matter how long and successful their term has been. In regards to this, a variation of Clark’s
(1997) final principle might be: “Use, [but do not abuse,] the full capabilities of an organization”
(Principles of Leadership, 1997, ¶ 1).

*Misconduct*

No person is incapable of being unethical. Leaders who choose to manipulate employees
in order to meet their own agendas may be selfish, egotistical, and arrogant. These persons exist
in every enterprise and reject the principle of setting the example of being an ethical role model
to the employees. This researcher has evidenced and confronted this type of person in her own
workplace. Associating with unethical leaders can be unpleasant and disconcerting. Fortunately,
there are more ethical role models in her environment, and she is able to discriminate wisely
between the two.
Management Secrets

The integrity and well-being of a leader can be determined by the way in which the leader structures and conducts each day. A leader who is largely unavailable, is overwhelmed, and constantly under daily stress and pressure, may not have the best interests of his people in mind. Finding balance in one’s life, and learning to handle everyday situations agreeably, will secure the leaders’ inner harmony, and the followers’ confidence and admiration.

Peterson (2003) revealed five secrets of management and survival in an address to women in public relations. The first is: one must agree that not everything can be accomplished “today”, but things “can get done tomorrow” (p. 766). Training one’s self to “set up tasks with deadlines within the day” allows one to find time for much needed leisure (p. 766). Reasonably structuring and organizing one’s time is the first secret of management. This “mantra,” as Peterson called it, is crucial to the next word of advice.

The second secret is to allot time each day for a crisis (p. 767). Peterson (2003) observed that great managers always have time for “big decisions,” when dealing with crises (p. 767). The way to manage this is to never schedule “back-to-back meetings” (p. 767). Peterson added that she believes in “management by walking around,” where she finds time to “see people in their offices” and relate with them consistently, and on a regular basis (p. 767).

Peterson’s (2003) third tip is to “turn yourself and your organization into a lean, mean learning machine” (p. 767). Continuing education, providing professional development, creating learning environments for the personnel, and enhancing one’s expertise are paramount in employee-manager satisfaction.

The fourth point presented by Peterson (2003) is to “find creative and unique ways to communicate- using technology or avoiding it” (pp. 767-768). She contended that “those
personal notes of yours, they get through and stand out in all the piles” (p. 768). Personalized and creative communication within the workplace is appealing and encouraging.

Peterson’s (2003) fifth and final recommendation “is to become a visionary leader. . . . I chose to become a visionary leader who focuses on the vision of where we need to be and go” (p. 768). She noted that people “need the space and room to add their energies and ideas” (p. 768). Giving people freedom to do their job allows them to make their own choices, and provides them with the motivation and energy to persevere, and the opportunity to grow.

Too often, this researcher finds that her superiors expect too much, too soon from the employees. Failing to comprehend the nature of persons, and delegating jobs without giving employees sufficient time to analyze and gauge the criterion, may demonstrate a leaders’ desire to relinquish a problem by handing it over to someone else. These same leaders may also choose to disappear in times of crisis, leaving the employees to troubleshoot and resolve the problem as they see best.

Providing employees with opportunities to further their knowledge, while at the same time interacting with their peers in diverse contexts, unites people and improves interpersonal relationships. Including one’s personal touch gives others a glimpse of her self, and builds esteem between people. Having the “same old” can get “real old” quickly.

Conclusion

Connaughton, Lawrence, and Ruben (2003) stressed the development of leadership skills in higher education. “Leadership education is a necessity. An educated citizen is the most coveted, vigorously cultivated, and dependable natural resource, and higher education rapidly is becoming a requirement for full participation in societies today” (p. 46). Leadership skills are so highly esteemed in the workplace that students are acquiring leadership expertise while in the
academic environment.

Leaders never stop learning, and followers are provided with the opportunity to learn and grow within the workplace as well. Employees that are educated, motivated, and energized will flourish and excel at their jobs. An intelligent leader provides employees with the freedom to produce resourcefully, and encourages employees’ progress.

The communication between leaders and followers will prosper when a leader considers the factors of leadership, and carries out its principles. A leader must have the strength and the dedication to uphold ethical and moral standards, communicate with purpose, and motivate with performance. A leader who selflessly manages the people with their best interests in mind is an ethical leader who respects the factors and principles of leadership.

A responsible leader recognizes how to fortify strengths and overcome weaknesses. A true leader will build on the past, and enhance the future of her people. As an emerging leader in her environment, this researcher intends to apply the factors and principles of leadership, and guide her people wisely, resourcefully, and righteously.
References


