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Leaders to Follow

LEADERSHIP

After 24 years of helping people of all ages and many nationalities to develop their leadership potential, the International Leadership Institute has distilled the essence of leadership into six simple lessons. This issue will deal with the first three lessons; September 2008 will deal with the final three lessons of leadership.

LESSON ONE: BE ORGANIZED AND FOCUSED

This may seem like very elementary advice. Since childhood most of us have been told again and again that we need to keep ourselves organized and focused in order to do the simplest task. But how many people manage to organize their desks, let alone their work life?

Organization involves three distinct competencies:

- *Ability to prioritize:* with many distractions coming at us from all sides (the media, our colleagues, our bosses, those whom we serve, the environment in which we work), it's easy to lose track of what we're already doing in order to deal with what's just happened. The urgency of a new bit of information or event has to be weighed against the importance of what is being dealt with at the moment. This is hard to do, especially when everyone around you is pressing you with their needs and desires. Leaders need



"The Halls of Learning" courtesy Spencer Pitman

LESSONS I

By Sara Tusek

to know their priorities and resolutely stick to them in the face of the whirlwind of daily events. They must be able to say "no" when necessary without being offensive, and they must be able to delegate work to others without seeming to diminish the importance of the tasks they delegate.

- *Ability to handle multiple tasks:* this is the flip side of prioritizing. Once the tasks are set in order, leaders work at them (usually) all at once. Seldom is there the luxury of handling just one issue at a

time; leaders constantly switch from one to another, keeping all in mind at the same time.

- *Ability to process new information into the existing framework:* just when you think you have everything organized and you're ready to work, you suddenly get new facts, or a different perspective. The ability to smoothly integrate the new data into existing models is a crucial leadership skill. Wise leaders never ignore what's brought to their attention.

Staying focused on each task while you work on it, while simultaneously keeping in mind everything you need to do, is the skill that differentiates leaders from managers, who can focus on one thing at a time quite successfully but may get overwhelmed when asked to focus on a multitude of factors. When those factors keep changing, the manager gives up but the effective leader thrives.

Leaders to Follow

Providing Leadership Development Services and Programs
in the US and Europe since 1985

Leadership Lessons

from p. 1

LESSON TWO: DON'T BE DIVERTED

Closely allied to the lesson of organizing and focusing your attention and energy is the lesson of avoiding diversion. This goes against the grain of American culture, in which diversion is the spice of life.

The leader, once having established priorities (Lesson One), can't give in to anything that gets in the way of the agenda he or she has set. Even the niceties of life can't be allowed to siphon off energy and time that's already been assigned to certain tasks.

This may seem like another obvious lesson, but try it out in real life. You've set up your timetable for an important obligation. This means that weeknights and weekends must be used for work. Now your family begins to complain that you're not available. They need you, too. Why does your job come first?

Why? Because it *must* come first. If not, you'll be diverted by any number of exciting and interesting opportunities, many of which are worthwhile and of prime importance to your personal life.

This is often the first crucial test of a leader's commitment. Until you have to set aside your own priorities in order to fulfill your leadership role, you haven't understood the price of leadership. And often there's no pat on the back from anyone for doing "the right thing;" you must be able to gain personal satisfaction from doing the right thing *simply because it's right*, in order to survive as a leader.

LESSON THREE: IMAGINE THE OUTCOMES OF YOUR DECISIONS AND POLICIES

In the nineties, American business had a love affair with the idea of "vision." Vision was the new tool to motivate people and to make it possible for business leaders to ex-

tract sacrifice from their employees; vision provided an emotional platform from which to spur workers into being as productive as they could be. Vision as a concept was successful, as the high levels of American productivity (even in the face of a steady loss in real wages in the 2000's) demonstrate. Vision is powerful.

But for the leader, vision must be more than a faddish concept or a corporate mantra. Leaders really do have vision. They are those rare people who can imagine what will happen in the future, and adjust their actions in the present to achieve their desired outcome.

Two lines may seem to be parallel, but if they are not, over distance they will diverge more and more. What leaders decide to do may seem like small decisions, but the impact of all these decisions over time is enormous. Being able to envision the results of a decision, factoring in all the unknown and uncontrollable outside influences, requires genius. Any leader who can correctly predict the outcome of his or her decisions deserves a medal.

Yet this is what leaders must do, every day. In decisions large and small, popular and hated, leaders are setting the course for their organization by every move they make. Most people would collapse under such pressure; great leaders rise to the challenge and succeed.

These three lessons for leaders are the simple ones. Be organized and focused; don't be diverted; imagine the outcomes of your decisions and policies. The next three lessons in the September *LTF* will be a bit harder!

The International Leadership Institute

- Was founded in 1985 in Princeton, NJ
- Remains dedicated to leadership development
- Has run more than 70 educational programs in the US and Europe, for more than 900 participants
- Has partnered with the US Department of State, the University of North Florida, the Jacksonville Chamber of Commerce and more than 700 other businesses, universities, religious organizations, private citizens and government agencies