

NEWSLETTER 47

What Great Leadership Looks Like in This Time of COVID-19

In Tom Friedman's recent article in the New York Times: "We Need Great Leadership Now and Here's What it Looks Like", he references Dov Seidman, whom I respect because of his willingness to look at issues from many perspectives. Reading this made me think about some of the important questions raised by COVID-19 about leadership.

In extraordinary times such as these, when so many people are experiencing uncertainty, fear, and anxiety, leadership matters more than ever. The questions are:

1. What do people need and want from their leaders?
2. What type of leader are you prepared to be?
3. What leadership skills are essential?

Today, people are looking for reassuring and trustworthy leaders who care about them as people while leading their companies through this storm. The disorienting nature of our current situation increases people's need to feel that they matter and that they can trust that they are being led with an eye toward the greater good and not based on the individual interests of their leaders.

Successful people and great leaders frequently have big egos, which is not necessarily a bad quality. It is often what helps drive them to create great companies, opportunities for employees, and to facilitate organizational success. It is important to believe in yourself and have a high degree of confidence in your decisions and abilities in order to be an effective leader. This only becomes a problem when self-confidence and a strong ego become arrogance and egocentricity and when leaders cease to listen to their team members and be influenced by what they need to hear.

Today, more than ever, it is essential to harness the power of confidence, strength, and a belief in one's self to help drive your company forward by balancing those qualities with "servant leadership;" leadership that demonstrates certainty in the path forward along with kindness, empathy, compassion, respect, and a caring for your employees as people first. This unique combination will increase stakeholder confidence, engagement, and buy-in and help bring your company through this treacherous time and build it back past the levels achieved prior to COVID-19.

Most of you have heard my views on leadership. You know my belief is that there is **no one type of leader**, but there are **qualities** that all good leaders must have.

Successful leaders in the current environment must:

- Balance hubris with humility and communicate a **concern for others and a commitment to the greater good**.
- Be **guided by one's values and principles**. Successful leaders have a clear vision which includes their values and they communicate this vision to others.

- Be able to not only share their goals but must **communicate the "WHY."** In order to have people believe in your vision and support you, there must be a **shared purpose**, one which everyone can articulate and one in which they understand **their role in achieving the organizational mission.**
- Understand that they do not have all the answers: A successful leader must be **collaborative, a team builder.**
- **Be Authentic, Consistent and True to their Values**
- Must have a "**high do to say ratio.**" All Leaders are imperfect, but they must strive to have their behaviors align with their words and stated values.
- Demonstrate that they **value others** and their contributions.
- Show **respect, compassion and empathy.**
- Strive to be **inspirational and optimistic.** When I think about our best modern Presidents, I think of FDR, JFK, Ronald Reagan, and Barack Obama. Four very different leaders, who had one thing in common: They were optimists and they inspired others to believe in themselves and the greatness of our incredible country. I am not ashamed of being a nationalist, a capitalist, and a progressive who cares about others, while believing in myself. But I also believe that there is no one person who can do it all, no perfect leader; we are all flawed and so successful leaders surround themselves with people who are talented and possess complementary skills; they are inspired by the greatness of others, not threatened by it.
- Be **coaches and mentors** who are committed to developing others achieve their full potential. They create a community of constant learning and professional growth.
- Believe that there are "**no simple solutions to complex problems.**" That in the words of Fritz Perls, father of Gestalt Therapy, "**Nothing's Free.**" Every decision has consequences and we must balance the competing needs.
- Understand that **choices are not binary.** Everything must be viewed on a **continuum** with the ultimate goal being achieving **balance.**
- Be **adaptive.** They **pivot**, they are flexible and agile. They anticipate and adjust to changes in the environment quickly, while remaining guided by their values.
- Practice **Participatory Management** in which people are active participants in the decision-making process so that they are engaged in developing the plan of action, not just implementing it.
- Create an **environment where people's basic needs are provided for** (See Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs) so that they can focus on self-actualization and the objectives of the company.
- **Trust people with the truth**, while providing them with hope.
- Create a **culture of experimentation**, one in which risk taking is encouraged, where "failing forward" is okay.
- Embrace the "**Pursuit of Excellence**" by having high, but achievable standards, bold goals, and shared strategies to achieve them.
- Be resilient and support a culture of resilience through peer support.

In today's world, our leaders, you, must **challenge and reject polarization, embrace diversity, respect divergent views**, show compassion, hope, and empathy, and be fully committed to finding shared solutions that benefit all of your stakeholders.

That is what people need from their leaders today in the time of COVID-19 and what will foster organizational success as we overcome this silent, but powerful enemy.

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