

Focus always precedes success.

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Are you seeing what you should be seeing?

Good Leader Inspires Followers

by Harvey Mackay

We're about to make some serious decisions in this country - or at least those of us who take the time to vote. Every election we have a remarkable opportunity to make things better. And the word we hear over and over again is leadership - who is better at it; who has the better plans; and who can assemble the masses and try to reach some agreement on how to progress.

Leadership is critical at every level of business as well as government. John Brock, who teaches leadership classes at the University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University, shared a list of thirteen principles of leadership he adapted from the United States Military Academy, and I think he's dead on. Can you identify these traits in your management (or your political candidates)? Could your management team win reelection?

1. Know yourself and seek self-improvement.

2. Be technically and tactically proficient.
3. Seek responsibility and take responsibility for your actions.
4. Make sound and timely decisions.
5. Set the example.
6. Know your employees and look out for their well-being.
7. Keep your employees well informed.
8. Develop a sense of responsibility in your subordinates.
9. Insure that the task is understood, supervised and accomplished.
10. Train your employees as a team.
11. Employ your team in accordance with its capabilities.
12. Set your priorities.
13. Take the initiative.

What I like most about this list is its simplicity. It cuts through the doubletalk that so often disguises incompetence. It leaves little room for misinterpretation. You are either following the rules or you're failing as a leader. Case closed. Brock maintains that all great leaders have four common characteristics: bedrock principles, a moral compass, vision and the ability to form a consensus. I couldn't agree more. The minute you compromise your principles, you lose respect. That goes hand-in-hand with the moral compass, I think. Knowing and doing what is correct even when it may be unpopular or perhaps unprofitable requires a strong character. Keep your moral compass pointed straight ahead and you will never have to apologize for your actions. General Robert E. Lee, widely respected for his military and personal leadership, summed it up: "You have only always to do what is right. It will become easier by practice, and you enjoy in the midst of your trials the pleasure of an approving conscience."

Vision is a little harder to acquire. I firmly believe it is an acquired skill. You can train yourself to see what's ahead and determine an appropriate response and plan of action. Consensus building used to be simpler, when competition wasn't as cutthroat and civility ruled. That's not the world we live in now, and the gauntlet has been thrown down. You need only look at the hostile political climate for a prime example of the difficulty in reaching agreement. But this trait, possibly more than the others, is what defines a leader. Dwight Eisenhower, who led our army and the country, advised, "You do not lead by hitting people over the head - that's assault, not leadership."

Through example and information, finding common ground is a very rewarding accomplishment - a win-win situation for all. Consider the story of Christopher Columbus. His crew became discouraged and threatened rebellion as they searched for the New World. They wanted to turn back, citing their voyage a "fool's errand." Columbus was undeterred, but attempted to reach a compromise: If they would be patient and faithful for just three more days, he would agree to abandon the search unless they had discovered land. From history, you know how that story ended. I'm adding one more trait that I find central to leadership, the ability to maintain your perspective. I remember hearing the story of how the Roman emperors handled Roman generals returning victorious from battles. The generals were welcomed in grand parades that featured their soldiers, all the wealth they acquired, and the prisoners they captured. Accompanying the generals in their golden chariots was a slave, who in the midst of the celebrations would whisper in the generals' ear, "Remember, you are a mortal man, all glory is fleeting."

Mackay's Moral: True leadership must exist for the benefit of the followers, not the enrichment of the leaders.