



Determining your leadership style - How can you improve your performance?

April 07, 2014 - Long Island

Most business leaders recognize the importance of their role in their organization's performance and success. However, many business leaders do not have a clear and definable leadership strategy. Rather, a good majority simply lead without any real conscious thought of how they and their top line executives are leading.

I believe that business executives and managing partners of professional service firms would benefit from first taking stock of their individual styles and then considering ways to deploy new measures for an enhanced leadership strategy for their organizations.

Leadership is conveyed in several areas, including: communication, decision-making, motivation and empowerment of employees, vision and execution of that vision. Let's take each one separately. Regarding communication, ask yourself, "Are you really listening?" When communicating with others, are you really focusing on what the other person has to say and turning off the thoughts in your head? Really listening is the key to good communication and also strong leadership. Beyond listening, leadership style relating to communication stems from whether an executive has an open-door or closed-door policy, a democratic or more autocratic approach to encouraging others to communicate their thoughts and ideas, and whether or not information is held closely or shared with others. I advise that communication is best when it's a two-way street.

How you make decisions also factors into your leadership style. When making important decisions are you the Lone Ranger seeking your own counsel solely or are you Seinfeld where your style encourages everyone to weigh in on everything. I caution against operating at either extreme, noting that the best leaders tend to be decisive, but only after they have weighed input from select, informed, and trusted advisors and colleagues.

Are you getting the results you want from your employees? Effective leaders recognize that in order for their organizations to succeed, they need to help their staff to become more productive, as well as better problem-solvers, decision-makers and team players. The motivation to become these things emanates from the top. A company's leaders must be willing to let go of control and empower their staff so that they too can emulate a sound leadership strategy.

It's been said by many: a leader is not a leader without vision. It's essential to leadership. Do you know what your vision is? Do you advance your vision through your words and actions? Is your vision understood by your management team and other staff members?

When you say top business leaders many names come to mind - past and present. Henry Ford (Ford), Jack Welch (GE), Sam Walton (Wal-Mart) David Packard (Hewlett-Packard), Warren Buffett (Berkshire Hathaway), Sir Richard Branson (Virgin), Steve Jobs (Apple), and Jeff Bezos (Amazon) are just some names that often come up. What they all had/have in common was/is vision and the dedication and plan for achieving their visions.

I suggest that businesses get in touch with their vision; verbalize it, write it down and communicate it - often - to their staff.

It's not only important that the people in an organization know and understand the leader's vision, but they too should be enlisted to support and advance that mission.

Despite the common myth, leaders aren't born, they are developed. Knowing your leadership style and then taking steps to improve it is the route toward a stronger, more viable organization that also benefits from a well-defined leadership strategy that is evident across all levels of the organization.

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