



APPOINTMENTS

MAKING OPPORTUNITIES KNOCK ON YOUR DOOR

Leading today's organizations

By Ben Manickam

Does character matter anymore in leadership? Should organizations worry about character if productivity is not affected? In an age, when the skill based "results at any cost" strategy seems to be the trend, when experience takes precedence over morals and ethics - principled leadership may not seem important anymore. However, while skills are important in relating to, and leading the team towards organizational goals, several studies conducted amongst employees highlight the importance of character. For instance, in the "Characteristics of Admired Leaders" survey developed by Kouzes & Posner (2007) and administered to over seventy-five thousand people of diverse cultures around the world, the credibility of the leader topped the list. The works of Sinha (1994), Misumi (1985) and Kakar (1971) on Asian leadership reinforce this aspect. Presented another way, people want to assure themselves that the leaders they follow are worthy of their trust. Stephen Covey in his work titled "Speed of Trust" illustrates this clearly. An informal survey of our own

organizations will confirm that people will follow leaders who can be trusted - more so in difficult times. In lean times, such exemplary leaders model cost-cutting by applying the cost cutting measures first on themselves. As a result of their integrity such leaders are able to build a high-trust team culture that is essential to navigate the organization through uncertain and perilous times.

Revealing weaknesses

Progressive leaders understand that the age of encyclopedic minds and the command and control approach in leadership is fast becoming obsolete. They know that Leadership is about networks and partnerships. Seth Godin in his work "Tribes" (2008) points out that while everyone can be a leader; most are kept from realizing their potential. Leaders with character are able to uncover and harness the hidden potential of every team member and utilize it for the greater good of the organization. Such leaders are humble enough to admit that they know that they do not know and surround themselves with people who can compensate

for their weaknesses. Goffee and Jones in their article "Why should anyone be led by you" (Harvard Business Review, Sept/Oct 2000) note that when leaders reveal their weaknesses, they reveal who they are - "warts and all" and thereby create an environment of interdependency and solidarity within the team. This environment of interdependency is of immense value - especially during tough times where total organizational commitment and participation become an absolute necessity. Such leaders are phenomenal networkers.

Team of Rivals

Leaders with character emphasize organizational success over personal survival. Such leaders go beyond personal loyalties and select those who are loyal to the organizational vision. Agreed, such decisions involve risks of betrayal and call for courage and inner strength in placing organizational success over personal fame. This demands going beyond personal differences, seeking the highest good of the organization and working with different and even difficult people towards the end goal. Doris Kearns

Goodwin in her much publicized book, "Team of Rivals", outlines how Abraham Lincoln was an outstanding example of this leadership characteristic. Goodwin offers ground breaking insights into Lincoln's leadership style when he chose his three rivals in the republican nomination to serve in his cabinet. William Seward, Salmon Chase and Edward Bates - all accomplished men of great standing, initially disdained Lincoln in the race for the republican nomination in 1860. On his victory, they were invited by Lincoln to serve as secretary of state, secretary of the treasury and as Attorney General respectively. Lincoln turned rivals into allies and harnessed their strengths for the greater good of the nation. For Lincoln this race was about the future of the nation and not about himself. Similarly, principled leaders are able to lay aside personal rivalry for the greater good of the organization. They see the role and place of people in the organization and are able to get that "Individual commitment to a group effort" (Vince Lombardi). Goodwin argues that had Lincoln not forged these "rivals" into a team he would not have been able to



lead the nation through one of its darkest periods.

Staying power

Bill Hybels refers to vision as the leaders "most potent weapon". Driven by their vision, such leaders stay the course with hope despite the challenges. The focus is on the long term. They understand that a leader is essentially a purveyor of hope, and like master builders, see the completed building arising from the rubble and the chaos of building sites. Jim Collins in his latest book, "How the mighty fall: And why some companies never give up" (2009) underscores the importance of hope - "if hope is abandoned, then you should begin preparing for the end". The discipline of delayed gratification is honed into a fine art by such leaders as they plod on steadily driven by the vision.

Character plays a crucial role in determining a leader's future. Moral and ethical challenges on the job test the strength of a leader's character. We must not forget that leadership is, primarily, service. As such, serving others is uppermost on the minds of the true leader. Leaders ought to see themselves as stewards of the "most important resource of the organization" and as such need to be trustworthy leaders. Furthermore, ethics in business is sustained by culture, not simply by compliance. Truly effective internal controls are the result of cultures of character - cultures that are created and maintained by leaders of character. The result of character is the mark that our behaviour leaves on the lives of others. Demand for leaders with character, therefore, will never diminish.

Ben Manickam is a Chartered Manager, serves as Director of the Center for Graduate Studies and lectures on the MBA and MSc (Organizational Development) programs of the University of Peradeniya. He can be contacted at ben@pgia.ac.lk

Seeking the Right Employee?



ADVERTISE IN



APPOINTMENTS

MAKING OPPORTUNITIES KNOCK ON YOUR DOOR

THE VACANCY ADVERTISING SECTION OF



Competitive Rates | High Caliber Readership | Free Web Advertising

Aravinda - 0773 219 777 Nigel - 0772385513 Hemantha - 0773 427 846 Madu - 0772 930 795

Motivation and solving office conflicts

THE CONSCIENTIOUS and well-meaning owner of a small business cannot seem to get his work force motivated, despite a good benefits package and pleasant working environment. "I am coming to the conclusion that it doesn't pay to be nice to people," he says. "Maybe if I fired a few of them I'd get better results."

The supervisor of a 100-employee division of a large company says his employees are demoralized; he wants to know ways to increase their motivation. An office manager is stunned to find out that two of her best employees told another supervisor she did not like them. "They are both top performers, and I can never remember being dissatisfied with them in any way," she says. "What's happening?"

These managers are discovering that managing means managing people. In the course of consulting and column writing I have found the two major problem areas for managers are how to motivate and how to reduce conflict.

Take the owner who is contemplating firing some of his employees. It is not that he is doing something wrong by giving them a handsome benefits package and good working conditions. He is just not doing enough. If you are in his situation you should ask yourself these questions: Do your employees participate in decision making? Do they have promotion opportunities? Do they think you have made promises you have not fulfilled? Do you reward them for initiative and superior performance?

People will work for money, but except in extreme circumstances, they resist working for money alone. They also want recognition, security and opportunity. There is, accordingly, a simple solution for the supervisor of those 100 demoralized employees: Tell them "thank you."

It is human nature to like praise and to be motivated to work for it. I often tell my clients, "Do you want to make \$1,000 in five minutes? Go and give an employee a word of praise. His work rate will increase, his motivational level will rise, and he will pass along his good mood to others."

And you must be aware that all the good work and good feeling you build up can be destroyed in ways you little expect. Take the supervisor who was amazed to find out that her two best employees thought she disliked them.

It can happen like this: The manager is worried about a procurement problem. Frank, the employee, passes the manager in the corridor and greets her with a smile. The manager, engrossed in her problem, looks up briefly and mumbles a reply. Frank's mood drops. He wonders why she is angry with him, what he did, whether he is doing a good job.

The next day, the procurement problem takes a turn for the worse. Frank tries again. This time the manager does not even respond. Frank's worst fears are confirmed. And the manager does not even realize it.