

PART 4 – Leadership Development for Organizations in Transition (EFFECTIVE PRACTICES)

This article on *effective leadership practices* is the fourth in a series of five related articles dedicated to Leadership Development for Organizations in Transition. The first article gave an overview of the four puzzle pieces necessary for the leadership team to transition, along with their evolving organization. The four pieces include:

1. *Evolving* Responsibilities
2. *Efficient* Structure
3. **Effective Practices**
4. *Executing* Plans

In this article, we will focus exclusively on individual leaders and their personal behaviors. Two questions we should answer: What are “effective leadership practices?” What determines if they are *effective*? To give us some context, Max DePree in his book *Leadership Is An Art* defines it this way:

“The measure of leadership is not the quality of the head, but the tone of the body. The signs of outstanding leadership appear primarily among the followers. Are the followers reaching their potential? Are they learning? Serving? Do they achieve desired results? Do they change with grace? Manage conflict?”

What are effective leadership practices? Those that accomplish these traits among staff. Research has given us solid insights into the required behaviors for organizational leaders to successfully lead others.

As an organization progresses through its lifecycle, the practices of leadership must also develop. The centralized management and decision-making of the founder/entrepreneur begins giving way to more decentralization and delegation of management responsibilities. A major objective at this stage is to develop *other* leaders within the organization. An environment needs to be created where others are able to excel, aligned with the organization’s goals. Kouzes & Posner in *The Leadership Challenge*, define leadership as “The art of mobilizing others to want to struggle for shared aspirations.” Organizational leadership is an *art* to be practiced and honed, with the goal of *mobilizing others*, in a way that they *want* to follow, and are willing to work hard because they *share* the aspirations of their leadership.

Leadership Behaviors

Given the decades of research by Kouzes & Posner, they’ve uncovered five leadership practices common among successful leaders. Their research shows that the following behaviors are consistent among all types and levels of successful leaders:

- They *Challenge the Process*: Leaders should search out challenging opportunities to change, grow, innovate, and improve the organization. This includes experimenting, taking risks, and then learning from their mistakes. They are not content with “the way we’ve always done it.”
- They *Inspire a Shared Vision*: Employees look to leaders to envision an exciting future. They enlist others in a common vision by also appealing to their values, interests, hopes and dreams.

- Successful leaders *Enable Others to Act*: They foster collaboration by promoting cooperative goals and building trust within the team. Managers and staff are strengthened by leaders giving power away, developing competence, assigning critical tasks, and offering visible support.
- Leaders should *Model the Way*: As the organization transitions, leaders must set the example by behaving in ways that are consistent with their shared values, and achieve small wins that will promote consistent progress and build commitment.
- Finally, they *Encourage the Heart*: Effective leaders take time to recognize individual contributions to the success of projects, and celebrate team accomplishments regularly.

These are behaviors that leaders in growing/transitioning organizations should seek to exhibit. The authors also noted that *credibility* is an essential trait for leaders. In essence, credibility and trust begins when leaders consistently *do what they say they will do*.

In *Good to Great*, Jim Collins talks about the various levels of leadership. Levels 4 and 5 align well with the practices outlined by Kouzes/Posner. An Effective Leader (level 4) “catalyzes commitment to and vigorous pursuit of a clear and compelling vision, stimulating higher performance standards.” The Level 5 Executive “builds enduring greatness through a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will.” Collins further explains that, “Level 5 leaders channel their ego needs away from themselves and into the larger goal of building a great company. It’s not that Level 5 leaders have no ego or self-interest. Indeed they are incredibly ambitious – *but their ambition is first and foremost for the institution, not themselves.*”

On the flip side, Collins also writes about what not to do in his book *How The Mighty Fall*. His research outlined five stages of decline. The first three align with what we’ve already addressed, the leadership practices that will *not* get you through adolescence:

1. *Hubris born of Success* (The success achieved in the growth stages often give leaders a sense that “they know better” which keeps them from seeking other views as they grow, and not changing their ways during adolescence)
2. *Undisciplined Pursuit of More* (Again, the past success may give leaders confidence to feel they can succeed in any area they chose to pursue – and they overextend)
3. *Denial of Risk and Peril* (In the adolescent stage, those “growing pains” we’ve been discussing are simply ignored as being a temporary glitch – they will pass)

Though easy to fall into these behaviors, they are certainly leadership practices to be avoided, since as Collins states – they are *stages of decline!*

No ONE Best Management Style

There is another perspective that needs to shift for many leaders as they develop. As a leader, you shouldn’t simply manage a certain way because that’s who *you* are. You manage a certain way because of who *they* are, and what they need (your employees). More specifically, different people in different situations require different approaches to management.

Situational Leadership is a term given to a management model developed years ago by Ken Blanchard and Paul Hersey. They propose that managing different people, doing different tasks, requires a combination of leadership skills. One style of management does not fit all situations. Though a *directive* style of management has fallen out of favor in recent years, there are certainly times when it is the most effective method. As an example, new employees (or employees taking on a new role) need and often seek specific instruction and frequent direction from their managers. Then, as employees grow in competence and commitment, they require less direction and more *coaching* or *support*. Eventually the manager may be able to completely *delegate* responsibilities to an experienced, self-motivated

employee. The manager's challenge is to utilize each skill and develop the ability to determine the most effective style with a particular employee in a given situation.

"The Golden Rule"

One final insight on effective leadership practices – the Golden Rule. "Do unto others, as you would have them do unto you." This may seem like common sense to many, yet it's often said that common sense is no longer very common. When dealing with managers over the years, or with consulting clients when they are faced with difficult employee, customer, or vendor decisions, the same question is proposed: "If you were that person – how would *you* like it to be handled?" This not only makes the person affected by the decision more real to the leader, it may conjure up a time when they wished a manager would have handled something differently for them. This doesn't necessarily mean your final decision needs to change. It does mean your approach or terms could be altered a bit. If you were the brunt of a difficult or even negative change – how would *you* like it presented and applied? It would be good to lean that direction.

On a personal note: Earlier in my management career, I was assigned to a mid-level management position at an aerospace firm in California. I was replacing a "command and control" type of leader and expected to turn-around a number of departments that were floundering. As a fairly young manager, I was intent on seriously practicing the leadership traits I had been learning about (outlined above). A year later, I received one of the best professional compliments I ever received from one of my direct reports. She said, "I never thought one person could make such a big difference." These practices aren't theoretical, they are effective.

In Summary

You may be thinking that working "on" the business to develop your organization through adolescence will be very time consuming – and you would be right (which is why many will utilize outside assistance). Jim Collins, in his book *Built To Last*, could not be more inclusive in his thinking about how leadership must drive their vision and values into everything they do:

"The essence of a visionary company comes in the translation of its core ideology and its own unique drive for progress into the very fabric of the organization – into goals, strategies, tactics, policies, processes, cultural practices, management behaviors, building layouts, pay systems, accounting systems, job design – into *everything* that the company does. A visionary company creates a total environment that envelops employees, bombarding them with a set of signals so consistent and mutually reinforcing that it's virtually impossible to misunderstand the company's ideology and ambitions."

Organizational leaders challenge, inspire, enable, model, and encourage. They manage people by giving them the type of direction and support they need, when they need it. When it's time for difficult or negative news, they treat those affected by the decision, as they would want to be treated. Finally, a review of leadership practices isn't complete without this quote from DePree in *Leadership Is An Art* :

"But to be a leader means, especially, having the opportunity to make a meaningful difference in the lives of those who permit leaders to lead."

Michael Wilkes & Company specializes in management consulting and leadership team development for closely-held businesses, churches, and nonprofit organizations challenged by the necessary leadership transitions due to growth or strategic change. For further information: www.michaelwilkesco.com