

BACK TO SOME LEADERSHIP FUNDAMENTALS



In a year that is more complicated, complex and connected than the last, going back to some fundamental principles and practices may help leaders to better ground themselves. There is a bewildering amount of literature and consultant offerings on organizational development initiatives such as change management and knowing what to think about and what to use can be daunting. Here are a few fundamental principles that can help guide your thoughts and actions as you work with your organization in 2007:

- **Participation not paper.** The father of organizational development, Kurt Lewin, proved through his experiments during the 1940s that the success of organizational initiatives was contingent upon how much employees were involved in the process. Employee satisfaction and motivation were both higher when they were part of the process as opposed to those initiatives that were directed by documents. So start involving people in your organization's key activities.
- **Listen twice as much as you speak.** Epictetus reminds us that "nature gave us one tongue and two ears so we could hear twice as much as we speak." Think about situations involving conflict. Roughly 20% of managers' time is spent dealing with conflict and yet very few are trained in how to manage it or how to fully harness its positive potential. One of the basic tenets of effectively managing conflict is to listen to understand what the other is trying to say. Listening means putting aside the BlackBerry, putting pens and pencils down and actually, if you can imagine, looking the other in the eye. This is how you open your mind to incoming information. Good leaders take the time to hear what is going on in their organization, before they tell others what they think. It's a practice that new leaders especially should try to hone.
- **Lead before doing.** Effective leaders should be spending most of their time at the strategic level looking out and around in order to develop a clear vision for the organization. This is not always easy when a leader is also a "doer." So, strong leadership also involves helping others to learn how to do the work that needs to be done. Very often when an individual lacks self-confidence and confidence in the organization, one way to feel in control and to preserve self-worth, is to work on familiar tasks that guarantee a sense of accomplishment. Every time you do this, a developmental opportunity is lost, so be careful and mindful if you are asked to lead in a field for which you have significant expertise.
- **Planning instead of patching.** Audits were conducted in a number of organizations in the United States some time after 9/11 to determine how well organizations were planning for future crises, in this case, terrorist ones. The area that organizations spent the most time preparing for was business recovery or the reactive phase after a crisis. Few organizations looked at identifying early warning signs of potential problems or concerns and planning for various scenarios to not only try to avert a crisis but to be prepared in the event that there may be one. This lesson holds true for most organizations and the crisis need not be life-threatening. Leaders that recognize the importance of taking time to develop a comprehensive plan with expected outcomes, strategies, priorities, performance standards, contingency planning and evaluation, are the ones who will be able to best lead in these turbulent times.



These fundamental principles are not the only ones that an effective leader needs today, but they represent a starting point for sound management.

It struck us as we were writing this article that these principles apply to life in general. We have been saying for years that an authentic, self-aware individual cannot and does not want to separate work and personal life - they are one and the same in terms of how a leader lives life. Perhaps if we apply these principles to our children, partners and neighbours, we could experience more enriched and fulfilling relationships.