

“Master Leaders”

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Kindle Notes by Dave Kraft

Change leaders make their points in ways that are as emotionally engaging and compelling as possible. Don Soderquist smiled and launched the conversation to a great start. You know, one of the things I discovered is that you can't change everybody. Egos get bigger and people become more arrogant, the higher their position. And it was a big surprise to me to see how many people at the highest level in an organization didn't know what humility means. I made a mental note of his point: leadership is not about your position as much as it's based on who you are as a person and the capabilities you demonstrate. Ken Melrose took up the thread. When I started working at Toro, the leadership model of the day was pretty much a top-down model. The big brass, the big shots with the titles, made all the decisions and told their minions what to do. As a young guy starting out, that was my model. I didn't know anything else or any executives who did things differently. But I learned that approach didn't work very well because it didn't engage the organization or create a trusting atmosphere. It emasculated employees from taking risks with new ideas.

I eventually learned that a much better way to lead was from underneath the organization, where you're coaching and mentoring and serving the constituency and employees, trying to make them successful. While a leader needs those strategies and techniques, now I recognize that it's far more important that the person have two additional characteristics. One is that he or she is the right person inside, someone who has a good level of character structure and maturity—that he or she is the real deal, so to speak. And secondly, that person must know how to relate to people on an authentic and real level.”

Chaplain Black offered one of his light bulb moments. As my understanding of leadership has evolved, I have come to see leadership as far more collaborative than I had previously suspected. As the years have gone by, I have come to think of leadership as the mobilization of people toward a shared objective. So leadership has become far more collaborative in the later stages of my experience than in the early stages. Effective leadership is about motivating people to be part of a collaboration in which everyone has a stake and the leader is simply directing the flow of energy and talents toward a specified, agreed-upon goal. Leaders teach through stories, even if the tale is told at their own expense.

I automatically recited my own description in my mind: *Leadership is motivating, mobilizing, resourcing, and directing people to pursue a shared vision that produces positive transformation.* Anxiously I awaited John's (Ashcroft) description. It didn't take long.

“First, leadership is the identification of noble goals and objectives,” he began, “and, second, it is the pursuit of those noble goals and objectives with such intensity that others are drawn into the process. Leadership is taking people where they are not already going.

It is about redefining the possible.” The outcome of leadership is people operating at their highest and best.”

Leadership is really the ability to get people with different personalities and different value sets to agree on what is important and move forward. It’s a science, as well as the art of beautiful speech-making.” Jon Gordon, one of the new voices on the leadership scene and a popular consultant to a wide-ranging clientele, piped in. “What great leaders do really well is communicate a clear, consistent, and simple vision that everyone in the organization can rally around. A great example is Doug Conant, the CEO of Campbell Soup Company.” I quickly rifled through my memory to place that name.

I recalled that he had been the “Leadership is not about what you do as the leader, but about what you can inspire or encourage or empower others to accomplish. real leadership is never about you getting the job done; it is helping others do what they can do best. Leadership is mostly about connecting people both to each other and to a future that they want to see. Success as a leader is getting people to achieve things that they didn’t think were possible on their own. You can’t worry, in a leadership role, whether you’re popular or well liked, and you can’t worry about what the media says. Your job is to help people reach their potential. One of the critical elements of successful leadership: staying true to your core values.

That shift happened because of casting a vision. You know, it’s really about worldview—offering a worldview that’s compelling and truthful and motivating. You know, one of the things that I’ve found about the cultures that have broken down is that they do not welcome the truth. The indications of an unhealthy internal culture are easy to see if you look, he explained, echoing John’s perspective. Turnover, generally toxic relationships between people, not being able to attract good people, losing good people, and a lack of candor and directness in the organization.

We seek a culture that upholds having fun, making the experience enjoyable, making it interesting to come to work, and having an open environment where people aren’t criticized for their ideas but are complimented on them and encouraged to provide input.” No matter how well conceived it is, though, the culture only becomes real when your people see it backed up—when others see their ideas being given careful consideration, and they are not being criticized for bringing up new ideas. When you hire immature or unhealthy people, they’re going to nurture an unhealthy culture and then blame you for it. And honestly, part of the fault is yours because you hired them in the first place. I heard Laurie Beth Jones affirm Ken’s story. Culture is a socially transmitted way of practices.

It’s not about what’s written down. Policy and procedure manuals are worth nothing. Leaders have to model the culture on a day-by-day basis or it will never take root. My research had shown that when you seek out raw talent to nurture into leaders, you search for two primary elements: a sense of calling to lead and the kind of solid, enviable character that enables the leader to make appropriate choices and to attract people by virtue of who he or she is deep inside.

Competencies are the third element that makes someone a genuine leader, but skills can be taught and refined, whereas calling and character are part of a leader’s innate package.

So I'm a real strong believer in the idea that leaders are built in part by modeling. They really learn from people who are coaching them. And I always try to coach my leaders to become coaches. Leadership development, in some form or fashion, is always about leaders being coaches. I think all great instructors are inspirational around their topic.

Putting people in jobs that they are not prepared for because we have not invested in their training is one mistake we are not going to make. We are almost religious about hiring. We hire their attitude and then we train for skill. If they're not in the groove by day sixty, or however long we had agreed to, I just don't keep them. I simply tell them, It's just not working out. Everybody comes to us on a trial basis.

You've got to make sure that you know your blind spots and that there are systems, processes, and people involved in doing the due diligence. Sometimes As you outline what the expectations are, then you can hold them accountable. You can't do that if you don't tell them the boundaries and standards. Is this person a can't or a won't? Can't is about abilities. We can help these kinds of people in most cases—not in all cases, but in most. But won't is about attitude. Sam's statement—you hire for what they know and fire for who they are—struck me like a baseball bat.

If nothing else, it reasserted the significance of a person's character, and the importance that John had attached to evaluating character up front. So what you look for is a nice ratio between assets and liabilities. Where it gets dicey is when you get people who have a long list of assets but also a long list of liabilities. A good boss is one who is edifying, who is interested in your future and your growth and your career, and whom you admire and respect and appreciate because he admires and respects and appreciates you. The number one rule, when it comes to leadership, is never hire anybody you can't fire. If you're the leader, ultimately you've got to be able to demand a certain standard and expectations and have the ability to enforce that.

Rich Stearns (CEO of World Vision) opened our conversation. Perhaps the two most important jobs of a leader that I would have are, number one, setting and casting a vision that sets the sights of the people in the organization on a tangible goal that is palpable, energizing, and exciting. Number two, after casting the vision, the most powerful leverage a leader has is in the selection of the people who will carry out the vision. You're learning all day. Your life becomes a permanent university." Transition to leadership means a young leader has to go from being a doer to a coach.

Part of leadership is knowing when to follow. You have to know when to get out of the way. What a great insight! Leading is not always about being in front; sometimes a leader must allow others whom he or she has empowered to take the reins for a while. John Ashcroft nonchalantly stated, Everybody has great worth. People who believe that everybody has great worth are likely to be great leaders." So leadership is more than honesty. It's having a hunger, not only to tell the truth, but to be finding truth and reality. People who really lead just cannot exist in a world that does not create very tangible results. Great leaders serve people by using their ability to orchestrate change in order to create a better future.

Building and maintaining trust with people is crucial to creating the capacity for getting people to continually pursue a vision of a future that transcends the known. “Trust is letting people have as much rope as they need to be sure they feel good and they can deliver the goods,” “Trust is knowing that I’m not going to make some arbitrary, off-the-wall decision that impacts you without involving you in the process, because I’m your partner.

Confrontation just means you’re facing reality, but you’re doing it with grace and truth.” There’s no such thing as effective leadership without the ability to confront well, Another way to say this is that a leader’s ability to confront is the immune system of the organization. If the organization doesn’t have a good immune system, then there’s probably disease everywhere. A good leader is very strategic about when to confront, how to confront, why to confront, and whom to confront.” There’s a difference between a foolish person and an evil person. If you are really a leader and everybody is just going along with you, you need to question that complacency. That’s a time to figure out if you are really leading or if you are just running a popularity contest.”

Sometimes you need to avoid conflict. Sometimes you can redirect it, or deflect it, or even postpone it. And, yes, sometimes it’s good to orchestrate it. I think leadership is about bringing the danger with you. Leaders make people uncomfortable. We take them out of their comfort zones.” “Leadership is not about skill. It’s about character.

People with good character are able to extend their hearts and reach other people’s hearts and let other people into their hearts. There are certainly people who are more gifted and talented in those areas than others, but that in no way means that every single leader cannot also have a clear set of healthy values, be able to listen to and connect emotionally with others, be clear on what he or she is and isn’t responsible for, and be a person who welcomes and learns from failure.

Unfortunately many leaders who lack integrity compensate by using fear. They figure, Well, they don’t like me, but I’ll make them afraid of me. That’s another way to lead, but it’s not a good way to do it.” It’s one thing to be a boss, but it’s another thing to be a leader. People want to see something in you that makes them trust in you, that makes them want to go to the mat with you. They want to believe that what you say is true. Your track record is extremely important,

At the end of the day, people need to feel like they are valuable and they are valued. That’s where encouragement comes in. Only the leader can provide that. People often take a position with less benefits and money because of the encouragement factor. I found that the most effective way to have good followers is to inform them about where things stand. If you look at the Gallup research, Marcus Buckingham makes a real strong case that the best leaders are those whose followers say they know clearly what is expected of them and who are resourced specifically to meet those expectations. So to help people become better followers means letting them know, not in some vague way but in a very specific, direct way, what is expected and required of them, and to resource them with the time, money, and training that they need to do those things.

Here's an idea. And please, I want you to understand that this idea is not sacred. I want to hear your criticism of it. It may be a really bad idea or maybe it's one you can improve upon. Just don't be afraid to give me your opinion, because if you don't give me an opinion, you're not very useful to me. If you always agree with me, you're not very useful. So I'm giving you permission to challenge this idea. Leaders need to give people an opportunity and permission to challenge. The best way to maximize one's talents and to ensure success is to work as part of a team of leaders.

None of us is as smart as all of us.

It's harmful when leaders do not see the strengths that others can bring because they think they have it all. Those are dangerous people." Patrick offered other advice from his extensive experience in how teams work. "Teams should be smaller rather than larger. When you have more than eight people, the team breaks down.

Part of building an effective team is getting everyone on the same page or heading in the same direction, toward the same goal. You've got to be able to thrash it out and roll up your sleeves and argue with each other and tell the boss he is crazy. And when the team is done meeting, everybody has to walk out and get along and be on the same page.

My own studies had shown that it is best when the teams are purposefully orchestrated. I had discovered that when you find a group of leaders whose skills complement those of the other team members—that is, a visionary, motivational leader; plus a strategic leader; plus a networking, mobilizing leader; plus an operational, systems-building leader—then you have the makings of something special. Because I have argued that a leader is someone with three qualities—God's calling to lead, character that pleases God and allows Him to entrust the leader with authority, and the core competencies to get things done that fulfill a God-given vision.

The hunger for power is a horrible thing. I have never seen a power-hungry person survive; it eventually catches up to you. In *Good to Great*, Jim Collins writes that the two criteria of truly effective, great leaders are passion and humility. Leadership, by definition, involves pressure. If there's no pressure, there's no need for a leader.

The whole thing about listening is to listen with the attitude that you could have your mind changed." I love the whole concept of leading with your ears. I heard that phrase recently; it has a nice ring to it."

So I would listen to people, but when I made a decision, we weren't going to rehash it. Hey, you've had your say. I understand what you're saying. I understand why you believe what you do. But I'm making the decision. I've listened to everybody. Here is the decision, here's where we're going, here's why we're going there, and we aren't going to discuss this anymore. And when we walk out of this room, everybody is 100 percent completely sold on the fact that this is the proper thing to do. Perhaps the most important quality that a leader can possess is appreciative inquiry and listening without a preconceived agenda.

A leader needs self-awareness, being acutely aware of how others perceive him or her. An integrated leader has the abilities we talked about earlier: the ability to lead and relate

to people on a deeper level and understand them, the ability to be clear and defined, the ability to fail well. If all of those abilities are working well together, they are integrated. Leaders need to be able to welcome challenging information.