

LEADERSHIP AND EXCELLENCE: NURTURING CORE COMPETENCIES IN THE GLOBAL WORKPLACE CULTURE

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to define the traits of Leadership and Excellence. It seeks to investigate the importance of these qualities in today's global workplace culture. The paper delves into the various connotations of Leadership and excellence and tries to identify their defining characteristics. It also explores how these qualities can be acquired through training, determination and practice, stressing on the fact that these are qualities which are not inborn but can be nurtured.

Keywords: *leadership, excellence, professionalism, workplace*

The traits of leadership and excellence have become intrinsic criteria which employers look for in a prospective candidate. Companies and the industrial sector, globally, are increasingly on the lookout for applicants who possess these qualities. Nurturing, enhancing and exhibiting these qualities have become determining markers of not only getting a job or a business contract, but also for job retention, promotion and for getting an expanding clientele. These characteristics have become the indispensable prerequisites in every field and no matter what the interests and expertise of the candidate are; these have become qualities which every ambitious aspirant should possess. If an ordinary person gets the work done, a person with leadership and excellence will get the work done in the best possible way, bringing optimum satisfaction to all the stakeholders, ensuring statistical and real-time up growth in all the relevant sectors and to all the related people.

Leadership and excellence together, thus, constitute the consistent and unrelenting striving for betterment and perfectionism, aspiring for continual growth and success through vision, determination and hard work and inspiring others to do the same in the process. Both traits, therefore, are not for solitary triumph and achievements but are always interconnected with the collective feats and progress, ensuring in the process that there is evolution and satisfaction for every person involved. Leadership, though, it starts at the individual level, always orients towards collective efforts and success and hence, can never be isolated from teamwork or group acts. It is a formidable job to be a leader, for it is not a goal to be achieved but is rather a starting point for a plethora of challenges to surmount and opportunities to be seized by raising the bar of success and accomplishments higher every time, and without

losing for a moment the welfare of the group linked to the leader persona. Leadership and excellence are thus, the incessant striving for the betterment and success of the individual self the team and the company or the organization in which all the members are intricately involved. It is the dynamic pursuit and practice of work ethics, happiness, gratification and success, the horizons of which are ever expanding.

Justin Bariso defines leadership as “a process of social influence which works to increase the efforts of others in pursuit of a common goal”. In his article “In Search of the Definition of Leadership” he discusses the ideas of Travis Bradberry and Kevin Kruse, authors who have written profusely on leadership. Before delving into the connotations of leadership, Bradberry and Kruse reiterate that leadership is not about titles or hierarchical and managerial positions. It is not simply about having followers or being able to influence but “a mindset in action”. Bariso, however, disagrees and cites the example of Adolf Hitler, whose leadership incited hatreds and killings and led to the persecution of millions of Jews. One, therefore, needs to be cautious of the immanent dangers of the travesty of leadership and the large scale perils it may inflict if such leaders are blindly adhered to. Hence, when we talk about leadership it is effective good leadership. It does not pursue a ‘lead and others follow trajectory’ but encompasses the variegated aspects of excellence in every positive aspect. Leadership does not imply commanding and getting the work done while creating a culture of silencing and fear. It encompasses constructive virtues as farsightedness, motivation, inspiration, benevolence, humility, dynamism approachability, judiciousness, encouragement, empathy, understanding, solution focused, target oriented and so on. Great leaders are people who envision the future, aspire for excellence and dream big and have everybody’s interest and profit in mind. Leaders are passionate about their work and treat every aspect of the work with equal diligence. Great leaders aspire for excellence in every field and are continually striving for perfection. They know how to command and give respect and solicit the devotion of others towards their work. They ensure conformity and reliability naturally without pressurising.

Leadership seeks extreme devotion, commitment and dedication and the ability to instil these qualities among those who are under his lead. It requires untiring efforts, hard work, resilience, optimism and an innovative mindset. Effective leadership demands loyalty, integrity and honesty, for a leader is not simple a boss allocating tasks and deadlines but someone whom the others look up to and try to follow the examples set up by the leader. A leader serves as a continual reminder to people to settle for nothing less than excellence. For leaders every moment is opportune to better their skills, to train themselves, to identify the obstacles and overcome them with the smartest choice and unflinching positivity. At the same time they make it certain that opportunities and resources are equally available to those associated with him. He is a motivator, a guide, an evaluator and a mentor. He ensures that everyone performs their best and the performance betters each time. Leadership excellence demands that priorities are clearly set, productivity is rewarded, duties are allocated efficiently, decisions are made smartly, workflow is properly streamlined, others opinions and ideas are taken into consideration, autonomy is granted within a relevant sphere, trainings are provided, problems are anticipated and tackled rather than passed on. In other words, leadership excellence demands that people go beyond their allocated roles and perform for

the larger picture. It is about enthusiasm and innovation, about empowerment, cooperation, acknowledgement, recognition and appreciation.

Levenete Nagi, Human Resource Manager at National Instruments Hungary says, “For me Leadership Excellence has dual meaning: on the one hand leaders achieve high performance together with their teams, on the other hand leaders who primarily assist and develop their colleagues, providing them with energy, inspiration and opportunities on a daily/weekly level” (“Leaders in Leadership Excellence”). Michael Lee Stallard, while focusing on two crucial areas of management ‘tasks’ and ‘relationships’ warns that under emphasis on any one of these two areas tend to be unproductive. He cautions that sole task focus “eventually burn people out”, while sole relationship focus “don’t set sufficiently high performance standards and challenge their teams to meet those goals” (Defining Leadership Excellence). It is, therefore, crucial that a leader realizes that a mere insistence on work excellence is no guarantee of the team meeting the performance benchmark. He needs to identify the abilities, preferences and excellences of those in the team and delegate tasks accordingly, clearly stating the deliverables and the deadlines. Any work done should be with a clear goal-oriented focus and with a sense of purpose. The leader’s role in setting the priorities clear and straight and motivating the members of the team is definitive. Stallard rightly points that all the major tasks should be communicated through written forms and while financial resource forms the basis of any assignment other factors as time and workload should be taken due cognizance of if one aspires for maximum quality output. What really fuels commitment and honesty among members towards a leader is the feeling of being valued and connected together. It is imperative for a leader to instil a feeling of worth and importance among his members. Two significant ways of achieving these are: firstly, appreciating their contributions and efforts in presence of others and giving them due credit for their work. Secondly, giving them a fair chance to put forth their ideas and opinions and make them a participant in the decision-making process. In addition to enhancing their sense of worth and motivating them, these would also benefit the team as a whole by contribution of varied perspectives, fruitful discussions and novel ideas. More importantly, members should not be treated as lifeless commodities whose productivity should surpass their cost to the company but as efficient individuals able to deliver their best through commitment and encouragement. A leader should continually strive to create a positive bonding with and among the members, ensure that there is group interaction and that the interests and aspirations of all are considered and if possible chances are provided to them to realize their dreams.

However, these do not mean that the decision-making authority of the leader becomes slack or that he becomes oblivious of the strategic link between him and the other members. He assigns roles and responsibilities but provides for a certain degree of autonomy and avoids micromanaging. While inspiring and leading by example, an excellent leadership should incessantly provide chances for growth, learning and self-development opportunities to others through trainings, and other avenues of enhancing their skills and capabilities. Excellence is a mindset, an attitude and a habit, not a solitary act (Excellence is Not a Skill, It’s an Attitude). It is about having that competitive edge and momentum, about taking initiatives, accountability and responsibility for the problems and the undesired results. It is about networking and camaraderie, about assisting others and giving proper feedback and

constructive criticism, about seeing that people perform, about appreciating and instilling confidence, about focusing on quality deliverables and professionalism, about maintaining relationships with all the stakeholders, about risk taking and knowledge seeking, about handling work stress, about not giving up, about bouncing back from adversities, about resilience and hopefulness. Leadership excellence is, thus, being different and being unique.

Kevin Kruse mentions ‘10 things which successful leaders do differently’. He notes that the leaders are likable-not liked, lead with love, have principles rooted in company’s values, are transparent with his members, use failures as learning experiences, and know their power. They value time and schedule everything, are disciplined and do not let their mobile disturb their meetings, and rather than having an open door policy, have well-defined time slots to facilitate communication proactively.

Leadership excellence is, thus, about creating a productive and engaging work environment and delivering in a manner that “consistently exceeds expectations” (How to Provide Customer Service Excellence). It is about ingenuity in ideation, defining standards, developing, implementing, assessing and bettering them. It requires leveraging diversity, creating a democratic bias free work environment, managing efficiently and nurturing the competencies and possessing strategy, action and vision. An efficient leader always facilitates truth-telling and open communication. He self-reflects and analyzes his style periodically to improve. In whatever is done leadership and excellence ensures that the ideals and standards and the vision of the company are never compromised with. The hallmark of leadership excellence is to make it certain that the values and integrity are never tampered with.

In conclusion, it can be said that it is an erroneous belief that true leaders are born and not made. Leadership and excellence are desirable traits in the global workplace culture and they are traits which can be nurtured by everyone and acquired through training, hard work, determination and “deliberate practice” (Cain).

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