

So you think you can lead? Understanding three myths about leadership

In a recent meeting between two leadership organizations, a huge rift between theory and practice was identified.

In theory, we might understand that leaders work together to create a better future. Yet, this meeting clearly identified the lack of relationship/partnership between the leaders of these leadership organizations within the same city. If leadership organizations can't practice what they preach, how can you expect an average company executive to practice what he or she preaches?

On a national level, a recent article in US News & World Report found a significant leadership deficit in our society. A poll by the magazine found two out of three Amer-



INSIGHT

TED SUN

InSight features advice on small business issues from different local perspectives.

icans believe their leaders have been corrupted by being in power and a majority believe their leaders are out of touch with the average person. And in the Ivey Business Journal, an article reported the

growing toxic leadership in organizations.

This rift between theory and practice raises a fundamental question: Do we really understand what leadership is? If you had to define leadership, how would you define it?

Academicians have published countless theories and studies about leadership, yet the concept still eludes many people. Leadership as a concept is full of myths that needs dispelling:

• GREAT MAN

One common myth is that leaders are responsible for the start, middle and end of any venture. For example, many management texts state that organizational lead-

ers are responsible to set goals and create the strategies to achieve them. In your home or business, how does that play out? Who do you believe should be setting goals for your organization? So if the desired end is met, leaders are celebrated; if the desired end is not met, then leaders are blamed.

Ask yourself if you are capable of creating effective goals and are innovative enough to create some ways to reaching those goals? Of course you are. When someone else sets a goal for you, it is not necessarily meaningful to you. Why should you give your invaluable time for a goal you had no input on? Leaders are not task masters. They might hold specific positions of authority, but it does not mean that they create meaningful goals for those involved.

• LEADERSHIP TRAITS

One of the most common beliefs about leadership is the trait theory. Many believe leaders have specific traits and behaviors. If you look at many popular books, they carefully illustrate specific traits and behaviors of leaders. So in order to be a

Announcement: Greenwood Publishing Group, Prager will publish Survival Tactics: Top 11 behaviors of successful entrepreneurs

Greenwood Publishing Group found great excitement in Dr. Sun's research and its presentation.

A contract was offered to Dr. Sun for the publication of the research on entrepreneurship.

The manuscript will be completed within the next few months.

Publication of the book will occur around 2007.



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leader, you must acquire certain traits. Sometimes, they even tell you how to develop those behaviors.

However, research has debunked the trait theory. R.M. Stogdill, a well respected leadership researcher, conducted 120 trait studies and found that traits alone do not identify leadership. People looking to become leaders through the acquisition of specific traits may not reach their goal.

• OUTCOME/BUSINESS FOCUS

One final common misconception about leadership is the result of one's leadership as a business measure. Wall Street and some media outlets tend to only look at the outcome of businesses and decisions, rather than the process.

In business, Wall Street might be a major player in looking at the numbers for determination of success. Yet, in reality, the profits have only one purpose and that is to serve stockholders.

As leaders, if you focus on the outcome of an event or decision, the fear of failure will increase stress.

In some cases, a high focus on the result can push people to falsify numbers in order to save their jobs. Where is the leadership in that? Focusing on an end point is only one perspective and often, it misses the possibility of the lesson that can be learned, which drives a long-term, sustainable success.

Leadership needn't be about position, specific behaviors or a specific outcome. Consider that leadership is about the intention you possess when making a decision.

Take a moment to reflect on your definition of leadership. Once you've define what it means to you, look at your behaviors – is there a rift or are you in alignment?

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