

Are You a Leader?

Consider the Three Common Threads of Leadership

As CEO and president of seven personal and organizational development companies, I have had the opportunity to travel all over the world to talk with people about their own personal development as well as the development of their businesses. In talking with people from all corners of the world, there have been three common threads, or themes, emerge.

1. **Every person that I have talked to wants to be more effective leader.**

This is true of CEOs of large corporations as well as hourly workers in the smallest businesses.

2. **Every person has the potential to be an effective leader.** In the course of a person's lifetime, invariably, they will be put into a leadership position in some situation, whether this be a business, a family, a charity, a church, a sports team, or whatever; most people must fulfill a leadership role at some time in their life. The good news is that everyone can rise to the challenge and be an effective leader.

3. **For an individual or business to succeed and thrive in the 21st century, it must develop effective leadership skills.** In today's and tomorrow's business environment, the person with the best leadership skills will more than likely prevail.

In my discussions with people from around the world, there have been a number of questions that have arisen over and over again. **The following are some of those questions and my responses:**

◆ **"Why has leadership become such a hot topic?"**

Leadership has always been a hot topic in the sense that it has always been important. The difference today, however, is that we're being inundated with mountains of information and confronted with a multitude of options – much more so than in the past. John Adair said, *"Leadership is about a sense of direction. It is knowing what the next step is.* With the huge amount of information that we have available, it presents many options, alternatives and choices that confront us.



"Leadership is becoming an investment that individuals and companies can no longer afford not to make."



Since leadership is about deciding on and moving in a specific direction, the need for effective leadership has become almost desperate.

◆ **"What exactly is effective leadership?"**

Unfortunately, leadership suffers much the same fate as the concept of quality; *"You can't define it, but you know it when you see it."* Tragically, this makes it that much harder for people to develop their leadership potential. One of my favorite authors, Peter F. Drucker, was right when he said, *"It (leadership) has little to do with leadership qualities. Its essence is performance. A leader's actions and a leader's professed beliefs must be congruent."*

Leadership actually involves a combination of three separate factors.

- Ability or Knowledge
- Attitudes or Beliefs
- Actions or Habits

To be a truly effective leader, you must have all three working in unison.

This, in fact, is why most leadership development programs fall short.

◆ **"What is the best way to develop Leadership?"**

Traditional methods – books, seminars, university programs, etc. – are woefully inadequate in two ways. First, they tend to concentrate on only one factor – knowledge – while excluding the other

two. It's relatively easy to teach people about leadership whereas it's much more difficult to get people to adopt new beliefs or change their habits.

Second, if they attempt to deal with beliefs or habits, it's usually in a way that has no significant or lasting impact. As Warren Bennis put it, *"Leadership doesn't come from genes; it doesn't come from reading or listening to lectures; it comes through the hard-earned experience in the arena, rather than watching from the balcony."* The reason that we have been so successful is because we have developed a process that produces real and lasting results in all three areas.

◆ **"Why don't individuals and companies do more to develop their leadership abilities?"**

Primarily because they are operating under the wrong paradigm. Individuals and companies tend to view leadership development as an expense, where the goal automatically becomes to reduce it as much as possible, especially in today's intense competition. Individuals and companies need to change this paradigm and view their development as an investment. Instead of trying to reduce it, the goal then becomes to maximize the return.

We call it ROPI – Return On People Investment. We are able to show our clients a measurable return of 100 percent to 1000 percent or more, straight to their bottom line. I completely agree with Tom Peters when he says, *"Invest as much in human capital as in hardware. Treat people as the company's most important resource and productivity and profit will follow."*

Leadership development can and should be one of the most profitable investments an individual or company ever makes. In fact, it's becoming an investment that individuals and companies can no longer afford not to make.

By Randy Slechta, President of Leadership Management International, Inc. a global leadership and organizational development company.