

MARG DARSHAN

CLASSROOM TO COMMUNITY

SHAPING ETHICAL LEADERS OF TOMORROW



Leading And Leadership - An Inside/ Outside Approach.



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In a world where the only constant is change, can we prepare young person's entering organisations to step confidently into roles of leadership and influence?

John Quincy Adams, a former President of United States of America said, 'If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.' This wisdom highlights the importance of seniors in organizations instilling leadership qualities in youngsters, who may be the visionaries of tomorrow.

In a rapidly changing world, with technology becoming the major differentiator in most or all spheres of human endeavour, 'To lead or be led' may also have to be examined in the context of how technology affects such roles.

Yet to allow oneself to view the whole proposition of Leading and Leadership against the backdrop of technology may vitiate 'the experience of what an organism', in this case the human being, goes through in the process.

The German word 'Umwelt', meaning 'an organism's unique sensory world', simply said, means 'how an individual experiences the world'. His or her 'Umwelt' gains weight and strength when the person recognizes that to allow oneself to be led or to lead, are both impacted largely by the person's world view and the impact his/her own existence / living has had on the individual.

Thus, if we 'thin slice the loaf' of Leadership into digestible chunks, it simplifies how each of us may understand and approach both the idea and play out of our role in a leadership position.

Briefly, the concept of Leading or Being Led falls into 4 categories:

1. Leading self - congruence: Are what goes on within me and in my interactions outside me in sync? (intrapersonal).
2. Leading others - custodian: how am I being received? (interpersonal).
3. Leading with others - co-creation: do we walk together? (team work).
4. Led by others - committed: can I follow? (Striving to serve).

However the efficacy of leading or being led will only gain traction if an ethical approach, overlaid with consistent values plays out.

Leading self:

Two words or values that are gaining eminence across all disciplines of human effort, be it running a business or being a teacher are Integrity and Fairness.

I had the opportunity to interact with a very senior and reputed captain of Indian Industry and he used the two words to explain his philosophy and approach to what he termed 'self-management'.

I was curious and requested him to tell me more.

He said, and I paraphrase what he said; 'there are only 2 qualities, in my view, that differentiate an ordinary person from an extra-ordinary one. The 2 qualities are Integrity and Fairness. Integrity to me is, will you commit an unethical act, when you know no-one is watching? Fairness to me is, 'treat others as you wanted to be treated, without exception.'

The feeling of being congruent thus plays out when I know, between what I say, feel, think and do, there is no conflict.

Leading others:

Whatever the demands of the circumstance be, can I follow the edict 'Do unto others what you would want done to you'? Expanding on this idea I am reminded of the example of leading others, as attributed to Gandhiji, of telling someone to stop eating sugar only after he had done it himself first.

In recent times, the story of the organisation, Satyam Computers is a remarkable example of how in 100 days the organization, which was on the brink of bankruptcy, was turned around by 4 immensely respected and admired business leaders, who came together at the behest of the Government of India and not only resuscitated the firm, but also extended it's longevity.

The story, 100 days of the turnaround has been well captured by Padmashri T.N. Manoharan, one of the illustrious persons who was nominated to the Board and his co-author Mr V. Pattabhi Ram in their book, 'The Tech Phoenix.'

The members of the board appointed by the Government of India truly played the role of custodians.

Without remuneration and only the desire to ensure India's image on the world's business stage does not suffer and wanting every employee to continue to work with them, they toiled and demonstrated unequivocally what stewardship and trusteeship meant.

Leading with others:

A teacher of mine would often tell me that there is no dance that can be danced alone.

I remember confronting him by mentioning so many Indian dance forms where I have witnessed a dancer alone on stage.

His response was interesting and intriguing; he said the beauty and fullness of any dance form gains currency only when the solo performer or artist is able to create for the viewer an illusion of another person on stage during the act.

The dance then becomes a visual treat as we notice that we are viewing the duality of human existence, that the human being is not an island and the individual's existence becomes richer 'when we see the person in relationship and not in isolation'.

If we subscribe to this thought then it is easier to appreciate the idiom 'it takes two to tango.'

Similarly, relating back to the resurrection of Satyam Computers, the 4 custodians not only brought their own considerable skills and the wisdom of their own experience, but also drew the employees of the organization into the rebuilding effort. The end result was therefore, the sum being greater than the individual parts.

Led by others:

In the early 1970s Robert Greenleaf wrote extensively about the concept of Servant Leadership. Drawing on theology he wrote about the importance of serving. While servant leadership is primarily about developing those who we serve in our capacity of Leader, the underlying understanding of servant leadership or even being Led by others is about situational leadership.

For example, if one were to visit a city for the first time and needed to go to a specific place, in spite of having the address to the place that one has to go to and even having access to 'a Google map', it is wise to ask the taxi driver of the taxi we may hire or an autorickshaw driver who we may engage to take us where we wish to go.

In such a situation it is therefore the driver we engage who will lead us to our destination.

If this analogy is extended to organisations, we know that often it is probably an unqualified, yet

experienced employee who provides the solution we need. Thus, placing our faith in one who we think knows better, most often, requires of us to commit ourselves to follow and be guided without hesitation.

Ethics and values in leadership

The basis for demonstrating purposeful and effective leadership involves both ethics and values.

Ethics in leadership involves guiding people to make good decisions based on ethical values such as fairness, morals, trust, honesty, and accountability.

Ethical leadership involves leaders and managers making decisions based on the right thing to do for the common good, not just based on what is best for themselves or for the bottom line. It involves leading by example and prioritizing the common good over self-interest, ensuring that actions benefit not only the organization but also society as a whole. Ethical leaders demonstrate empathy and social responsibility, recognizing their duty to foster a positive environment for all stakeholders.

Values are the bedrock for corporate culture. As the essence of an organisation's philosophy for achieving success, values provide a sense of common direction for all employees and guidelines for their day-to-day behaviour.

Values, especially shared values, define the fundamental character of the organisation.

In this way it creates a sense of identity for those in the organisation and makes employees feel special.

One of the most important ways senior leaders in organisations can impact youth, entering the workforce is by modelling ethical behaviour; through everyday interactions, decisions, or the way they approach challenging situations. By consistently upholding principles of fairness, justice, and respect, senior leaders can show youngsters that these values can be applied in the organisation.

In summary, therefore, both leading and being led requires an incumbent to 'demonstrate passion, not sputter; to ignite and not douse'.

About the Author: Author is sensitivity trainer, trained from India's well recognised body for applied behavioural science, the Indian Society for Applied Behavioural Science (website: www.isabs.org), the Indian arm of National Training Laboratory, USA.

Post-Graduate degree in Human Resource and Organisational Behaviour from one of India's most well-known institutes for human resource management, namely Xavier Labour Relations Institute [XLRI, Jamshedpur] and a Ph.D. in 'Behaviour of the Small-Scale Entrepreneur', from a leading university namely the Anna University, Chennai, India.

"When educating the minds of our youth, we must not forget to educate their hearts."

— Dalai Lama