

In this presidential election year, one would think that a discussion of *leadership* would be high on everyone's agenda. Sadly, that's not the case. The reason may rest in the definition of the term itself.

Of all the definitions I've read, I like this one the best, perhaps because I learned it as a Marine: "Leadership is the art of influencing and directing people in such a way as to obtain their commitment, confidence, respect and loyal cooperation to accomplish the mission."

The definition clearly defines what it takes to be a leader as well as what will result when good leadership is practiced. Embedded in this definition is the idea that leadership must be earned.

Being a leader in this sense is a challenging assignment because it requires that leaders live their lives according to a specific list of personal characteristics. First and foremost is honesty. Next comes competency. Leaders are also people who have a sense for the future and where things seem to be going. Finally, true leaders are inspirational. They have a knack for getting their folks focused on a goal and inspiring them to achieve it.

Certainly, the list of desirable leadership characteristics goes well beyond these, but these four were listed most often in surveys of business people on leadership.

In addition to sharing these attributes, successful leaders have a framework on which they build their leadership. Here are some of the items found in those structures:

■ **Vision** — People enjoy working in an organization that has a sense of consistency and long-term direction. A true leader sees this direction and then defines it in terms that encourage others to achieve it. A well-defined vision helps people make sense of what they are asked to do.

■ **Mission** — A mission statement defines why the organization exists and whom it serves. A well-constructed mission statement helps employees understand who the customer is and what level of care and service the customers should expect to receive. In my experience, many employees resent the idea of serving others because they don't understand

Leading People the Old-Fashioned Way

BY DAVE ST. JOHN



THE ABILITY TO
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why it's so important to the business. Make sure they understand.

■ **Planning** — Planning built around vision and mission focuses the efforts of employees on the main events of the business. It ensures that there's minimal time wasted on frivolous activities.

■ **Results** — Without well-defined results, a planning process is useless. Measuring results is a true opportunity for a leader to interact directly with employees. This is a golden opportunity to lead.

■ **Problem solving and corrective action** — Coaching, counseling, aligning and providing feedback are all part of leadership. Here, the leader shares experiences and wisdom so that the organization can learn and improve.

■ **Reviews** — Once a year, at a minimum, all employees should have a face-to-face review of their performance. These reviews provide the opportunity for the leader to discuss with them how they are doing, how they fit into the organization and what they need to do to improve.

■ **Rewards** — How much people are paid should be based upon two things: the nature of work they do and their level of performance in that role. There should be a direct, easily understood correlation between what they earn and their level of contribution.

Leadership requires a serious, personal commitment, and it really doesn't make any difference what your business is or where you conduct it. From the blue tees to the battlefield or the board room, the demand for good leaders always seems to exceed the supply. Maybe now we know why.

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