

## **Purposeful Leadership**

**“The very essence of leadership is its purpose. And the purpose of leadership is to accomplish a task. That is what leadership does-and what it does is more important than what it is or how it works.”**

**- Colonel Dandridge M. Malone**

Purposeful leadership means making decisions as part of an overall strategy to enable people to follow your lead. Often people are put in a leadership position and just lead by the seat of their pants. They make decisions that seem good at the time without evaluating each action as part of a strategic or overall plan. How will your employees know what is expected of them? Here are some suggestions to help you become a purposeful leader.

### **Evaluate Decisions and Actions**

As a leader you will be watched very closely by your employees. If you have a good relationship with the people you lead, their performance will validate your skillful leadership qualities. It is important for you to evaluate each decision or action from a leadership perspective. For example, ask yourself if the decision or action will help or hurt your influence as a leader. Keep your employees informed of progress or obstacles that may hinder or demand a reevaluation of your strategy. Remind them of the purpose behind the processes. Remember people want to find meaning and purpose in their work.

### **Don't Make Promises Unless You Can Keep Them**

This can be a problem for some leaders, as they are optimistic about future growth and may make promises based on what they would like to see happen. Most people understand that plans change, but if you say you are going to do something, do it. Employees will expect you to follow through. If you are unable to deliver on your promise, it is important to provide some explanation or feedback as to why you were unable to keep the promise.

### **Directional Leadership**

Leaders need to know what their vision is and consistently communicate this vision. It is important to work out exactly what direction you want a task or project to take and then to communicate concisely that direction. A great analogy to emphasize the importance of this is described by Mark Shead, President of the Xerox Corporation; imagine 15 people holding the edges of a parachute. The parachute is held tight so it doesn't touch the ground. Each person holding on has a “general” idea of where they are heading, but no real plan for getting there. One person is going to head straight toward the goal. Another is trying to head toward the goal but at a different angle, another wants to head to a few secondary goals before reaching the final

goal, and so on. Even though they may be working toward the same goal, they are moving in different directions and will most likely end up frustrated, tripping over each other, working against each other, and ultimately defuse or delay the completion of the goal.

As a competent leader you need to define and communicate your vision so that you minimize the unnecessary friction and keep your people focused on reaching the common goal. That is not to say that as a leader you don't take input from others and that you can't make adjustments midway through a project as new information presents itself, but you mustn't leave leadership to chance and just hope for the best. Always keep the desired outcomes in mind.

Purposeful leading can be a challenging; it requires effort, practice and focus. Being a purposeful leader requires an awareness of how you lead and the impact that your decisions have on others. This self awareness will improve your leadership skills and earn you the well deserved respect and influence with others that effective leaders can experience.

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