Real leadership starts where systems and processes stop working. Let go of what made you successful as an employee, stop working on skills and work on character traits instead.

Leadership Is Not A System

Sustainable success for today's leaders

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Why Johnnie can't lead

Two leaders were talking about solving the challenges faced by a large international retail business. They both saw it as a failure of leadership to address the needs of their employees and their customers. Yet they searched in different places for solutions. One looked for answers in the processes, procedures and policies of the company, believing that the systems that created leaders were at fault or perhaps missing from the company structure. The other believed that leaders had not been taught how to lead from the start of their career, nor where they challenged or inspired to commit to a common cause greater than 'make money' or 'meet the numbers'.

Are there systemic solutions for character failures of leaders?

No guarantees of success

There is a troubling trend about leadership for some time now. The mistaken notion that it's a process – That there is perfect, correct methods of leadership or perhaps the '5 secrets to managing troublesome employees' that will somehow make all leadership problems disappear.

The result – leadership AND management failures that are unfortunately masked by short term success. Perhaps numbers and performance improves but at the cost of customer defection. No one will patronize a company where the leaders mistreat their employees or treat them like things to be managed, because the employees will in turn treat the customers like things to be managed, not people to be served and inspired.

The troublesome thing about this is not that we all know this, for as leaders we do. What is more troubling is that leaders continue to buy (and buy into) training programs for managers that are counterproductive to helping them understand that it's their service, not their skills that matter most. Almost everywhere you look, there are workshops on how to be an effective manager or leader, for the titles are used interchangeably.

This approach of training for skills works tremendously well for employees fails when we move into leadership, for leadership is not the domain of skills but of character. This is a large cultural divide between leaders and employees. The beliefs and equipping of leaders and employees are vastly different.

Employees develop skills to "DO" something productive. Their productivity is measured, monitored, rewarded and encouraged. Leaders don't "DO" they "delegate". More correctly they 'do' through others, their team, their peers, their vendors, and their community. They measure themselves on the basis of their effectiveness at persuading others to take action. Effective leaders know this can only really be achieved in direct proportion to how much they

are willing to 'do' on behalf of others. Sometimes this calls for doing the job of their team but more importantly is how well the team cares for their leaders. Do they assume intent and act in the best interest of the leader? Do they anticipate their leader's needs and wishes? Do they submit willingly to the leaders directions and actions instead of acting out of grudging compliance? This only comes as a result of the leader caring for their people first.

Except for notable exceptions such as [Vistage](#), a peer leadership group, there is no outlet for people who desire to become better business leaders in America.

With such notable ethical explosions such as Bernie Madoff, Enron, Tyco, and the entire banking industry (or so the press would have us believe) our institutions have fallen into policy and policing malaise – these ethical problems have been answered by increasing legislation for corporate boards such as Sarbanes/Oxley (SOX) and the Dodd/Frank act.

Unfortunately, every leader knows you can't legislate ethics, though admittedly, with such spectacular failures that impact so many globally, the refrain 'we must do *something'* does have tremendous merit. In the face of '5 secrets to managing troublesome employees', legislation seems to be a better response because it provides more sure results. If a leader knows they will be subject to criminal penalties for moral lapses it will undoubtedly cause them to think twice before they act, though for true criminals perhaps the second thought is more about how to beat the legislation instead of deciding the true and right course.

Luckily, most leaders don't have this problem of moral defect, however, being misdirected into process based solutions in the mistaken hope of a guarantee of success ultimately creates the same result, a failure of leadership, driven by lack of knowledge and character instead of moral lapses in judgment. Sins of omission instead of sins of commission, as they say.

The Advantage of Adversity

So what then is the answer? Adversity. Specifically, adversity that builds character. This "[Adversity Advantage](#)" can be created unintentionally, through economic and natural events such as a downturn in the economy or facing a natural crisis (flood, fire, earthquake, etc.).

It can also be created intentionally, through training programs designed on experiential learning, where leaders in training experience an event and evaluate their responses and the responses of others. This can also be developed through reading, but not reading of 'how to' books on management or business processes. Instead reading biographies and classical works (moral dramas) that teach leaders how others faced moral challenges and the outcomes that resulted from those choices, both successful and not successful.

This type of learning (not training) can be systemized. Instead of a lecture based classroom approach you can look at your workplace as the classroom. Constantly challenging your leaders up and down the chain through a mentoring program and effective succession planning for 7 generations can create the appropriate perspective and structure for individuals intent on rediscovering the 'right answers'.   Through mentors reading books can be shared and

discussed, or in book circles as long as the book is a biography or classic work designed to teach a moral principle. Ultimately, the question is not how to avoid adversity but how to capitalize on it. The question should be 'what did you learn?' instead of 'did you dodge that bullet?'

Structured adversity through special projects and external volunteer opportunities can help others learn the true moral lessons of leadership. Specifically, having opportunities to consider the needs of others and observe the impact your actions have, negative and positive, intended and unintended, allows leaders to learn the 'right' way of leading if there is such a thing. Ultimately it will be an answer that is the right way for them, each time the answer will be different because the leaders and the participants are different.

The benefit is having someone externally observe and question the lessons being learned. The mentor does not have to provide the answer but merely has to provide the questions 'what did you learn?' and 'what will you do differently next time?'

There are workplaces where leadership lessons are taught daily using these methods, to all levels of employees - The United States Military. Inspired adversity training, mentors, debriefs and capturing of lessons learned is a crucial, critical part of the culture of success.

Of course, their failures are spectacular and announced globally, for the world to see and comment on. Moral lapses are monitored at every level, by every individual, and high standards of character are encouraged, expected and modeled for everyone to see. Public scrutiny is a high standard of excellence. With a global expertise and the need for instant responses with the right choices, the military meets a high standard of global excellence.

The difference character makes

Today, many corporations in America have an unprecedented, once in a lifetime opportunity to capitalize on the windfall of leadership presented by the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Unfortunately, most corporations don't have a way to capitalize on these leaders because they don't understand the secret, hidden military language, but now they don't have to. Modeling on successful peer leadership groups, we at Corporate Allies are launching veteran leadership groups inside corporations across America and globally.

You can launch a veteran peer leadership group at your company today, using the employee veterans you have already hired. More than just eating donuts, veteran leaders are mission focused and results driven. They deliver these results with compassion for those they serve. They are more than ready to tackle your toughest challenges because they've learned how to lead. All that remains for corporations is to capitalize on the benefits of military service.

If you'd like help launching a veteran leadership group at your organization, please contact us at (name), (phone), or (email). We're passionate about success and would welcome a chance to meet one on one.