

“Hearty” Leadership in a New Era

by Marianne Matheis

The elusive qualities of leadership have fascinated us for years. In a climate of continuous change it is even more difficult to get specific about what defines an effective leader. Are there specific events that thrust certain people into leadership roles either by personal desire or necessity?

As more and more people become disillusioned with our existing institutions, the climate seems right for new leadership paradigms to emerge. Workers are no longer willing to stay in organizations that preach “people are our biggest asset.” Unless those words are demonstrated in the day-to-day activities of the organization, workers are not willing to commit their energy toward that enterprise. While some employee turnover can be absorbed by the organization, a continual exodus of good workers can bankrupt a business.

In a rapidly shifting global economic environment that is driven by accelerated technological advances, what type of personal characteristics will prevail for leaders of the new millennium? To turn an idea into reality may not require the charismatic charm frequently associated with leadership, but rather a humble “imperfect” human being who can capture people’s heart and imagination to move a “point of view” forward. “Hearty” leadership would require turning current leadership practices upside-down!

The primary shift that must occur is moving from an obsession with the bottom line and competition to engaging the commitment of the workforce. “Lean and mean” must be replaced with a “richness in caring and sharing.” Many corporate executives who envision themselves as effective leaders with committed followers would be surprised to learn that, at best, they have “compliant subordinates.” It does not take a rocket scientist to realize that a compliant subordinate does not function at the same level as a committed employee. In addition to lost productivity, a compliant subordinate is very likely to move to disillusionment. Disillusionment leads to physical or “mental” departure of workers. If the person remains in the job but tunes out mentally, the person and the organization are trapped in a loose-loose situation.

There is a definite workforce crisis in corporate America. However, this crisis cannot be blamed entirely on the shortcoming of leaders. During the last century we desperately wanted leaders who had definite answers or solutions to problems. When they did not meet our expectations, we faulted them for being ineffective and went in search of someone else who could live up to our expectations. Role distinctions between leader and follower clearly existed and rarely did one shift from one role to the other.

As our collective attitudes have changed, so will leadership practices. We are no longer searching for someone who has answers to our problems, but rather someone who will facilitate a process whereby we can find our own solutions. We have abandoned our search for magic solutions and are opting for people who can “get real.” The leaders of tomorrow are those that are already standing in the wings because they have taken the journey of connecting the mind and heart. Our new heroes are making “hearty” leadership a priority. They are the true pioneers who will make “personal empowerment” a reality !

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