



TenStep Supplemental Paper

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Leadership at its Best!

A painter seeking critical acclaim for his work placed a painting on one of the busiest streets of New York. The accompanying signboard read “Your comments please.” By the end of the day there were a few hundred comments. Imperfect color choices, a bizarre theme, and a misrepresentation of the theme were a few areas that received criticism. The next day the painter placed the same painting with a different label. This time he asked people to suggest necessary changes for all that they thought was wrong with the painting. By evening, contrary to what one would have expected, the painting was as clean as it was in the morning. The corrections were negligible.

The canvas of leadership in the corporate world is akin to that of the painter. It can be easy to tell an effective leader from an ineffective one, but rather difficult to identify the qualities that differentiate the two. However, the crux of corporate leadership lies in accurately identifying and nurturing the skills and qualities that make a good leader. Knowledge about effective leadership serves both as a hiring and a training tool. Managers can make informed hiring decisions if they have an organization-specific leadership template. In addition, training and development programs can be scheduled accordingly.

Leaders leave their mark in their areas of passion. Organizations should thus provide them with an environment that helps them hone skills that are of interest to them. Before setting a leadership agenda, however, it’s important for senior managers to differentiate natural leaders from potential ones. Natural leaders have an inborn flair for leadership. They are an amalgam of the magnetism, charisma and core capabilities required to lead. Risk-taking and innovation come naturally to these leaders. While potential leaders have the requisite talent and skills, they prefer to work in a safe and well-defined work context. There are also people who fall between these two categories. The demarcation between different types of leaders is critical for leadership development.

Natural leaders, for instance, have the personality and basic capabilities that are critical for a leader. Nevertheless, they need to be trained in applying leadership to the practical aspects of business.

Framing a concrete plan of action for realizing the corporate vision is one aspect of business strategy that natural leaders have to be trained in. On the other hand, people who have leadership potential but are not natural leaders can hone their skills by working on them conscientiously.

Regardless of whether a leader is natural or developed, two critical fundamentals need to be recognized: first, that leaders are ambidextrous people; and second that they are change agents.

Fundamentally leaders



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Leaders cannot operate in a pre-determined framework. Rather, they have to juggle their actions and decisions between what “has been” and what “could be.” Practicing ambidexterity is critical to a leader’s success since it enables the leader to balance the traditional methods of business with new and more innovative ways of business. However, a leader cannot afford to make radical transformations without analyzing the traditional methods of business. Organizations can make ambidexterity work for them by teaming up leaders with different temperaments. Getting together leaders with a penchant for risk-taking with those who provide stability to the company by containing the risk factors is an ideal combination for corporate success. In doing so, organizations must ensure that both the risk-takers and risk-averters are ambidextrous. Ambidexterity in teams helps members to better understand their differences, thereby minimizing conflicts and arguments.

Managing daily activities is more challenging than it seems. Leaders therefore have to be adept in handling these little but significant challenges. However, using ambidextrous skills to manage the day-to-day activities is just one part of a leader’s role. The other and more significant aspect underscores the skill of leading paradigmatic change.

Managing and leading paradigmatic change is altogether different. Unlike the challenges that one encounters in delivering daily activities, paradigmatic change offers unpredictable and difficult challenges. Further paradigmatic change brings with it a significant chunk of emotional and mental issues to be addressed. Thus, leaders must possess attributes that would enable them to successfully meet their goals.

Passion for purpose

Leaders have to be extremely passionate about their goals and purpose to induce change. Change management as a process is both mentally and emotionally draining, hence it’s only the drive and passion for the purpose that will keep the leaders persistent in their efforts.

Stay in perspective

Leaders should be able to detach from the change management process to view it in the right perspective.

Innovation

Creativity is a must in business.

Strike a balance

Leaders should be able to balance the need for new and radical thoughts with practical and concrete action plans.

Teamwork

Effective leaders should blend various perspectives and mindsets. Hence, when working in a team, leaders should tactfully handle different views without hurting the intent of a person.



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Honesty and integrity

Honesty and integrity are the clichéd attributes of a leader. Nevertheless, their importance is undeniable.

Persistence and patience

Impulsiveness and impatience are a complete no-no for a leader. A display of utmost patience and persistence in all efforts is essential.

Tolerance

The path of paradigmatic change is fraught with uncertainties. Hence, leaders should demonstrate tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty.

Managers with such qualities will be able to identify the spark of leadership in potential employees. Taking cues from these attributes, managers can make informed decisions and chart a future course of action.