

Do Great Leaders Need Experience?

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As global consultants to the specialty chemicals industry over the past 39 years, we have witnessed the results of degrees of leadership capabilities that range from very poor to excellent. Of course, this range can be said of every industry at one time or another.

According to the Holden Leadership Center, an exceptionally effective business leader keeps the following 17 key success elements in balance:

Proactive vs. Reactive

The exceptional leader is always thinking three steps ahead. Working to master his/her own environment with the goal of avoiding problems before they arise.

Flexible/Adaptable

How do you handle yourself in unexpected or uncomfortable situations? An effective leader will adapt to new surroundings and situations, doing his/her best to adjust.

A Good Communicator

As a leader, one must listen...a lot! You must be willing to work to understand the needs and desires of others. A good leader asks many questions, considers all options, and leads in the right direction.

Respectful

Treating others with respect will ultimately earn respect.

Quiet Confidence

Be sure of yourself with humble intentions.

Enthusiastic

Excitement is contagious. When a leader is motivated and excited about the cause people will be more inclined to follow.

Open-Minded

Work to consider all options when making

decisions. A strong leader will evaluate the input from all interested parties and work for the betterment of the whole.

Resourceful

Utilize the resources available to you. If you don't know the answer to something find out by asking questions. A leader must create access to information.

Rewarding

An exceptional leader will recognize the efforts of others and reinforce those actions. We all enjoy being recognized for our actions!

Well Educated

Knowledge is power. Work to be well educated on community policies, procedures, organizational norms, etc. Further, your knowledge of issues and information will only increase your success in leading others.

Open to Change

A leader will take into account all points of view and will be willing to change a policy, program, cultural tradition that is out-dated, or no longer beneficial to the group as a whole.

Interested in Feedback

How do people feel about your leadership skill set? How can you improve? These are important questions that a leader needs to constantly ask the chapter. View feedback as a gift to improve.

Evaluative

Evaluation of events and programs is essential for an organization/group to improve and progress. An exceptional leader will constantly evaluate and change programs and policies that are not working.

Organized

Are you prepared for meetings, presentations, events and confident that people around you are prepared and organized as well?

Consistent

Confidence and respect cannot be attained

The exceptional leader is always thinking three steps ahead.

without your leadership being consistent. People must have confidence that their opinions and thoughts will be heard and taken into consideration.

Delegator

An exceptional leader realizes that he/she cannot accomplish everything on his own. A leader will know the talents and interests of people around him/her, thus delegating tasks accordingly.

Initiative

A leader should work to be the motivator, an initiator. He/she must be a key element in the planning and implementing of new ideas, programs, policies, events, etc.

The Notre Dame School of Business adds these attributes as keys to exceptional leadership:

- Motivating teams – Inspiring others is the mark of an effective leader. Motivation is best done by example and guidance, not by issuing commands.
- Team building – Putting together strong teams that work well is another trait of great leaders. The opposite is also true: if a team is weak and dysfunctional, it is generally a failure in leadership.
- Risk taking – You can learn how to assess risk and run scenarios that will help you make better decisions. Great leaders take the right risks at the right time.
- Vision and goal setting – A team depends on its leader to tell them where they are going, why they are going, and how they're going to get there. People are more motivated when a leader articulates his or her vision for a project or for the organization, along with the steps – or goals – needed to achieve it.

In most all researched definitions of Leadership, we found that the need for experience in general, was missing.

Interestingly, in the October, 2012 HBR, Professor Gautam Mukunda, Harvard Professor challenged and questioned experience versus leadership success. He concludes that “unfiltered”



leaders (those without experience) were both “most effective” and the “least effective leaders, while “highly filtered” (those with a great deal of experience) were leaders that landed in the middle of the pack.

The professor further concludes that “unfiltered” leaders (little experience) can “crash and burn” just as easily as becoming great and successful leaders. Steve Jobs and Abraham Lincoln were “unfiltered” (relatively little experience) and were great leaders because they could think differently without the experience filter getting in their way.

Mukunda says that “experience” many times prevents leaders from approaching business situations any differently than other experienced people. “Filtered leaders will usually make the basically same decisions.” They will usually become “good” but not “great” leaders.

In comparison, Mukunda compares Presidents Jefferson and Lincoln, concluding Lincoln was the “ultimate example of the “unfiltered” leader while Jefferson was a good decision-maker but he was the prime example of a “filtered” leader, accomplishing what others (Madison and Adams) could and would have done in his place.”

Lincoln was a two-time loser in Senate races and so outside of the system that he wasn't even listed in the top 10 Republican presidential candidates in some newspapers in 1860. Lincoln had the ingenuity to announce, “we won't give up Fort Sumter without a fight,” thus strategically, forcing the South to fire the first shot and unite the North behind him.

The conclusions reached in his research, Professor Mukunda says:

- Unfiltered Leaders are best when the organizations tolerance for risk is high.
- Unfiltered Leaders are best when the organization vision is to grow to dominance.
- Unfiltered Leaders are best when the organization is a start-up or is on the precipice of failure.
- Filtered Leaders are best when the organization just wants to be in business for 50+ years.
- Both type leaders are important in medium to large organizations.
- “One can choose leaders who are likely to lead an organization to big wins or big losses, or a leader who will definitely be good at their jobs but almost certainly won't be great.” **CW**