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SKILLS VS. QUALITIES

KEY QUESTIONS EVERY LEADER SHOULD ASK.

by Merrick Rosenberg

Leaders play a key role in organizations. The best leaders know how to communicate, motivate, empower, create a shared vision, inspire innovation and support change. All too often, however, they earn the title of "manager" because they are technically proficient, rather than because of leadership abilities. Consider the number one salesperson who gets promoted to sales manager but has little or no leadership expertise. Soon it becomes apparent that selling and leading require completely different skills.

The impact of poor leadership is clear: people don't quit their company, they quit their manager. Are you a good business leader? Ask yourself the following questions:

Do you manage or lead? Having people report to you means you wear two hats. One with the word "Manager" imprinted on it, the other with the word "Leader."

Both hats are needed for optimal success, but the leader hat is often not worn. The key difference is that managers focus on tasks and processes, but leaders always focus on people. Leadership is not about defining goals, assigning projects and making sure things get done...

That's what a manager does. A leader involves people in decisions, coaches their staff to help them be their best, creates an environment safe for innovation and risk taking. Is your leader hat broken in? What is the most important thing that your staff members can learn from you about being an effective leader?

To be an effective leader, be aware of your strengths and limitations. Be aware of what each of your staff members brings to the team and what each person needs to improve. If you coach and develop your people, you can develop a highly loyal and committed workforce. Would your staff say that you love what you do?

Truly effective leaders embody passion and spark excitement in others. Would the people around you say you are a force of nature that makes everyone around you feel motivated and good about themselves? Has anyone ever told you they can see you love your job? Are you the model of an engaged leader who builds morale in all those you encounter? And if not, what behaviors do you need to stop or start exhibiting?

Of the managers in your department or organization, are you in the top 25%, middle 50% or bottom 25%? When I ask this question at conferences, almost everyone identifies themselves as in the top quarter. However, most know this is not possible. Perhaps a more honest self-assessment comes from the question, "Where would your staff rank you?" After all, your manager's opinion of your ranking has a direct impact on your career. If you concede that you are not #1, identify who is #1 and determine what he or she is doing to earn that ranking...and learn from them.

If your manager left today, could you do his or her job? If you left today, could one of your staff members do your job? Most people answer the first question with a resounding, "Yes. I could do my manager's job." However, most people also report that they do not have a direct report who could take over the leadership role and achieve the same success. If this describes your situation, you need to make yourself replaceable by developing your direct reports. Ironically, this may be the key to your advancement.

If you left your organization today, would anyone want to go with you? People follow managers because they have to. People follow leaders because they want to. Loyalty to companies has decreased significantly over the past two decades. How many companies did your father work for in his career? How many have you worked for? If you are like most people, your father worked in fewer companies than you, and you have many more years left in your career than he does (or did). In today's business environment, loyalty is difficult to earn. Have you earned the loyalty of your direct reports?

Looking forward

Albert Einstein said that we should never stop questioning. But at some point we have to start answering and taking action. Remember, you cannot become what you want to be while remaining what you are.