

October 2002

Leading Effectively

Malay Bhattacharyya

Faculty, Indian Institute of Management, Lucknow

Follow this and additional works at: <https://managementdynamics.researchcommons.org/journal>



Part of the [Education Commons](#), [Human Resources Management Commons](#), and the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Bhattacharyya, Malay (2002) "Leading Effectively," *Management Dynamics*: Vol. 3: No. 2, Article 3.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.57198/2583-4932.1239>

Available at: <https://managementdynamics.researchcommons.org/journal/vol3/iss2/3>

This Research Article is brought to you for free and open access by Management Dynamics. It has been accepted for inclusion in Management Dynamics by an authorized editor of Management Dynamics.

Leading effectively

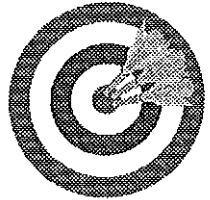
PROF. MALAY BHATTACHARYYA

In this note, the author discusses some issues that he considers important for leading effectively. He believes that these issues are quite general and are applicable across all functions of management as well as across all organizations. The issues discussed in this paper are based on the author's experience as heads of various activities and tasks within and outside of IIM Lucknow. To that extent the readers may not find anything new or profound in what follows, as it is not based on scholarly academic research on the subject.

Goal Clarity

The most important facet of effective leadership is a clear definition and understanding of the goals and objectives. A leader must know what business he is in. Unless he is clear about the objectives, all his efforts, however well intentioned they may be, will be direction-less and fruitless. He will not be able to ask the right question nor will he be able to identify the right problem areas. It is a futile exercise to find the right solution to a wrong question. On the contrary, if he were clear about his objectives, he would be in a position to ask the right question, and even if he is able to work out an approximately right solution to that question, his purpose will be achieved.

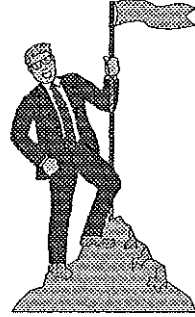
It is equally important to make people, working with him, accept and believe in the same goals and objectives. This is easier said than done. This is where communication plays a vital role. The importance of communication is discussed in a later section. Further, the leader must



be open-minded, flexible, and patient. He should also have the persuasive skills to arrive at a set of common goals and objectives. Once the goals and objectives have wider acceptability, it would be easier for him to carry people along with him. A good leader is one who is able to carry people with him and not the one who leaves every body behind him. If the leader fails to carry people along with him, people will not own responsibilities, will feel marginalized and gradually distance themselves from the leader. This will obviously result in lower productivity and performance.

Lead by example

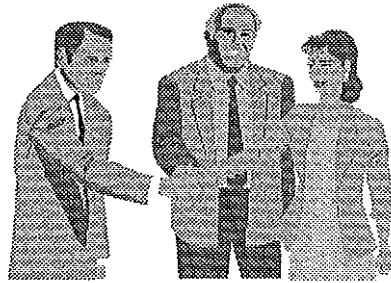
The leader has to set examples by doing and accomplishing what he expects from other people. He must practise what he preaches. The leader is constantly watched and is under a close scrutiny by all the people working in the organization. Therefore if he fails to deliver the goods or his actions are contrary to what he sermonizes, he does not enjoy the confidence and trust of the people. Further, what a leader does and how he does it gets percolated down the line in the organization and not what he says. Unclean or questionable action of the leader will definitely vitiate the atmosphere and eventually spoil the culture in the organization. It is therefore extremely important for the leader to follow the right code of conduct that he expects the other people to maintain.



Human angle

It is nice to be important but it is more important to be nice. Whenever one holds charge of an important activity he is obviously an important person in the organisation. But he should not allow himself to be overwhelmed by the feeling of being an important person. This may generate a sense of pride and authority in him, which may get manifested in the form of being rude to his subordinates and even to his peers. This will definitely create tension and ill feeling among the people working with him, and their performance and productivity will be adversely affected.

Every person should be respected as a human being first; his emotions should be understood and respected. If a leader fails to do so he will never be able to win trust and confidence of the people. By virtue of his power and authority, a leader can possibly command people working under him, but never will he get their co-operation and respect. Respect is mutual.

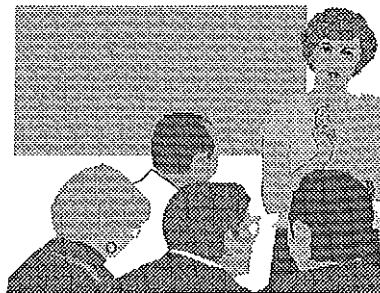


Communication

The leader must have the time and patience to give an audience to everyone - subordinate, peer or superior, who wants to communicate something to him. By hearing others, not only does he give opportunities for any possible steam to be let off but also provides others the

satisfaction of being heard. This has a very positive impact on the minds of the people within the organisation. This is what a democratic leader does.

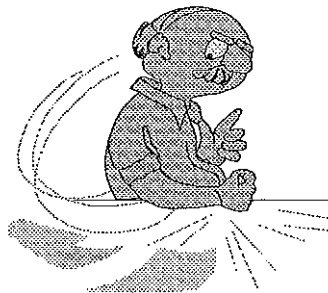
A democratic leader is able to carry people with him and is successful in achieving his objectives. On the contrary, an authoritarian leader takes decisions unilaterally without giving others the opportunity of being heard and generates discontent and dissatisfaction among the people within the organisation, and eventually becomes unsuccessful. Besides, by consulting others, one might get new ideas, new approaches, and new angles for looking at things. The leader must keep all the channels of communication open.



He must consult and discuss with as many persons as possible, but should not get swayed by the inputs from others, and decide what seems correct by his judgement. The leader must always remember that every body has a right to be heard but not taken seriously always.

Hard Decisions

There will be several occasions when the leader will be called upon to take hard decisions for maintaining sanctity of the system. Obviously, any hard decision will affect somebody or the other adversely. But he should never hesitate to take such decisions when he has to. If he did, then the message to the 'guilty' person is 'one can get away by doing anything'. He will also be considered as feeble and meek. The message spreads, and more and more people will exhibit deviant behaviour, and he would lose control as the head of the organization.



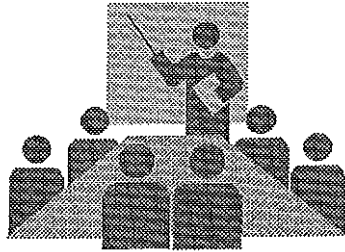
However, before taking a hard decision, the leader must look into its fall-out and the pros and cons of the case very carefully, explore all alternatives, and convince himself that there is no other softer option available and the decision is for the good of the organisation's systems. In the short run, however, any hard decision that the leader may take would make him unpopular. But that should not deter him from taking such decisions as, sooner or later, most people including the affected ones would realise and appreciate that he had done the right thing. In this context consistency is very important. He should not allow any kind of bias to creep in in his decision making process, neither should he be partial.

Advance Planning

For all activities, advance planning is extremely essential and very helpful. Now, what is advance planning? Planning involves: a) identifying the appropriate persons who will actually perform the activity efficiently, b) identifying the infrastructure needs, c) setting a target date for accomplishing the same, d) deciding on how exactly the activity has to be carried out, i.e., who will do what and in what sequence, e) anticipating the possible bottlenecks and working out alternate contingency plans. There also have to be appropriate controls

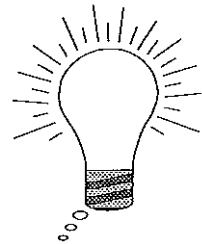
mechanisms and checks and balances for monitoring the progress. This helps in avoiding fire fighting, and, more important, significantly reduces the chances of committing avoidable mistakes. One of the most important benefits of advance planning is smooth and efficient functioning of the system. Advance planning also helps in the accomplishment of the activity within the target date with almost certainty. The last point is extremely crucial, especially when the activities are time-bound, and there are interlinkages with several other time-bound activities.

If one of the activities in a chain is not accomplished on time, it snowballs into other unnecessary activities, and also adversely affects the rest of the activities in the chain. As a result, the entire system is thrown out of gear, perhaps affecting the functioning of the other systems as well. The consequence could be no less than a disaster.



Innovation

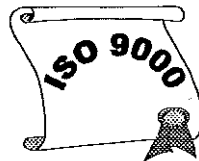
An effective leader cannot afford to be a maintainer. He has to innovate and look for continuous improvement there is always scope for improvement. By improvement I do not only mean modification of the existing system for better performance. If necessary, the leader may have to introduce radically different new system.



There is no foolproof perfect system, there is no procedure or document, which cannot be simplified and improved further. I believe the words 'total perfection' apply to God only. We, worldly mortals, however clever we may think we are and however much knowledge we may generate or accumulate, we can never achieve total perfection. We must accept this and strive for improvement all the time. For this one has to be innovative, one has to do things differently.

Concern for quality

There is no substitute for quality. How one performs a task is much more important than how many tasks one does simultaneously. One must bite as much as one can chew. In order to prove 'how much I have done', more often than not, people take up a number of responsibilities or initiate a number of activities, little realising that, at the end of the day, either he will not be able to accomplish all of them or even if he does accomplish, the quality of the work could be abysmally poor. Poorly administered tasks not only create a bad impression about the leader, but also create a number of other problems and difficulties in the system and for the future administrators and leaders. It is, therefore, extremely important to assess one's own strengths and weaknesses very carefully and then judge one's capacity to shoulder responsibilities that can be discharged without compromising on quality.



Simplify

One of the key elements for superior performance and efficient management is to simplify all the procedures, documents and paper work. Simplification has many advantages. Simplification of procedures helps people understand their nature of work better.

$$1 + 2 = 3$$

Once a person understands his work well, he feels more confident and more motivated, and thus becomes able to produce his best. On the contrary, for systems with long and complicated procedures, incompetence, inefficiency, and non-performance thrive and get justified. With the simplification of procedures, a task can be accomplished much quicker, with significantly lower manpower, and obviously at a much lower expenditure.

An inappropriately prepared document creates confusions in the minds of the users. A considerable amount of precious time is wasted in seeking and giving clarifications, and many a time they are open to interpretations and are misused.

Once a document is made simpler and more compact, the decision-making is much quicker there is little scope for ambiguity and discretion, which, in turn, helps taking objective and consistent decisions. An objective and consistent leader wins the confidence, trust and respect of the subordinates, peers as well as the superiors. This ultimately helps in building a healthy culture of confidence, mutual trust and co-operation within the organisation, which are some of the essential ingredients of a high performance organisation.

Eye for details

If one wants to excel in any area of work, one has to have an eye for the details. If there is a little flaw here and a little error there, one cannot really expect to excel. Satyajit Ray, the noted film director, had an eye for the detail, which he manifested through several of his great films that made him one of the world's greatest filmmakers of all times. In the same breadth, in the area of management also one must pay attention to every little detail, keeping the totality in perspective, to ensure error-free and timely delivery of the task. One should not lose sight of the total picture while looking at the details. In fact he should develop the total picture by looking at the finer details. This helps in better planning, anticipating problem areas, and minimising the commission of avoidable mistakes. Needless to say, it also improves the quality of the work significantly.

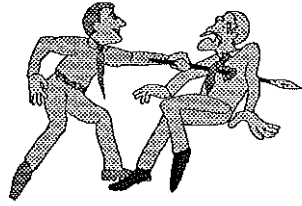


This trait should be vigorously honed, nurtured and developed.

Accept Reality

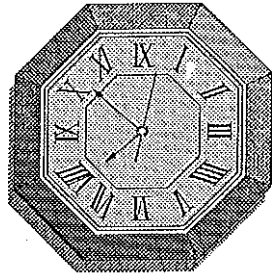
Lack of co-operation from at least some of your colleagues and staff or some departments, unnecessary criticism in the form of backbiting and corridor talks by some of your colleagues, and politics are part of the game. They existed from time immemorial, they exist today, and

they will continue to exist as long as the human civilisation would survive. So it is unwise to expect perfect or even rational behaviour, friendly relationship and unselfish co-operation from one and all in an organisation. It is, therefore, very important to recognise and accept this reality, and proceed with the job at hand. While one is heading a function, he must only be concerned with the job he is expected to perform, and therefore, should never attempt to correct the behaviour of others. We are not reformers. On the contrary, if one gets too much bothered about what others do or say, he will be affected both physically and mentally which in turn will affect his performance in the job. Further, accept the fact that there will be resistance to change. The resistance occurs due to various reasons. Most people are comfortable to maintain the status quo, many are not able to see the benefits of the change, some feel threatened as they have to put in extra effort to learn to work in the changed system, and some others may feel jealous. But be tolerant, have courage, persuade others, try to build a consensus and implement change if you are convinced that it is for the good of the organisation.



Finish before Deadline

Procrastination is a great evil. One should never aim at finishing a task on the last day. In his experience, the author has observed that as the completion date of an activity approaches, one may encounter one or more of the following problems: there is a power failure, critical staff members are on leave or fall sick, suddenly the computer or the printer breaks down, the software develops a bug, the necessary items are out of stock, the telephone is out of order for several days, there is a sudden declaration of a national or local holiday or too many holidays fall in a short span of time and so forth. One must, therefore, be prepared for any or all of these eventualities and try to finish the task much before the target date. Only then, the timely completion of the task can be guaranteed.



Conclusion

In this note, I have primarily restricted myself to some of the major issues relating to the style of functioning, competence and skills of a successful and effective leader. I believe the issues are quite general and are applicable across different functions as well as different levels of management within an organization. As mentioned in the beginning, the issues discussed in this paper are purely on the basis of the author's experience and observations as an academic administrator. They are not on the basis of any systematic research. But the author strongly believes that the issues are extremely important and are widely applicable to a number of other situations and organizations.

(* This paper is based on a talk by the author on "Achieving superior performance -- some reflections" delivered at the National Seminar on Creating and Sustaining High Performing Organizations, IIM Lucknow, April, 2000.)