Are True Leaders Born or Made?

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Many people may think that leaders are born, not made. While it is true that some people are born leaders, other leaders are born in the midst of challenges or adversity. What about you? Have you started a new business? Have you recently been promoted to a position that manages other people for the first time? Do you feel your leadership style has been ineffective in creating a team or obtaining the true potential of your employees?

Clearly, leadership potential exists within each of us. That potential can be triggered by outside events, or it can be learned by exploring ourselves from within. Training can help with the latter approach. Once you learn the techniques of true leadership, you will be able to build the confidence it takes to lead. The more experience you have acting as a genuine leader, the easier it will be for you, and it will become natural and rewarding.

Simply speaking, “leadership” is defined as “the ability to lead.” Unfortunately, this is not very helpful. A better definition comes from the BNET online Business Dictionary: “The capacity to establish direction and to influence and align others toward a common goal, motivating and committing them to action and making them responsible for their performance.” Although this is more descriptive, it is not substantial. It does not tell us what leadership actually is, but rather what it does. To know what true leadership is, we need to examine the characteristics of a leader.

The mark of a true leader is not a position or title held, but how many people are willing to follow him or her. Santa Clara University and the Tom Peters group outline the following leadership characteristics: honest, competent, forward-looking, inspiring, intelligent, fair-minded, broad-minded, courageous, straightforward, and imaginative. Do these attributes describe your leadership? Another approach can be to look at the following principles that were adapted for the business environment from the United States Army leadership training:

- Be tactically and technically proficient
- Know yourself and seek self-improvement
- Know your employees and look out for their welfare
- Keep your employees informed
- Set the example
• Ensure the task is understood, supervised and accomplished
• Train your employees as a team
• Make sound and timely decisions
• Develop a sense of responsibility in your employees
• Employ your team in accordance with its capabilities
• Seek responsibility and take responsibility for your actions

You will notice that none of the above actually tells you how to lead in a practical manner. The list does not address what to do or say in any given situation. That is because there is no real formula to being a leader. Leadership must come from within and is based on your personality. Leadership must be developed, and skills must be developed. Through training, people learn how to develop their innate leadership abilities and build the confidence required for them to become a true leader.

As long as there have been leaders, there have been those who tried to determine how and why they were successful. Leadership itself has not evolved, but our understanding of it has. It is important to understand why very different leadership styles can be effective, why the same leadership techniques will not work in every situation, and which leadership style best fits your personality or communication style. Everyone has leadership potential within them, but understanding these concepts will help you maximize your leadership ability.

The definitive leadership style research comes from Paul Hersey and Kenneth Blanchard, which they expressed in their Situational Leadership Model. In this article, we have discussed leadership attributes and influence on followers. The Hersey-Blanchard model addresses the key to practical leadership development: the attributes and styles of the followers. The Situational Leadership model addresses four types of leadership styles, based on the follower; the four styles include Telling, Selling, Participating, and Delegating.

Not everyone is on the same intellectual, maturity, compliance or motivational level. Different people are motivated by different things, and this must be taken into account if a person is to be a great leader. It is learning to meet people where they are. Communications experts consider it critical to tailor your message to your “target audience.” It is the followers that you want to motivate and influence and you cannot do that if you don’t know whom you are trying to motivate or influence.

**REMEMBER! A leader is not a leader if nobody follows!**

Through all of the leadership studies, it has been observed that there are a variety of attributes and abilities associated with leadership, and these vary from leader to leader. Some leaders are great speakers, while others are great writers. Some leaders are very quiet, but the force of their logic or passion wins the day. The difference between a good leader and a great leader is partly the number of leadership skills they have developed. The other part, however, is their ability to properly apply those skills to those who would follow.