

Leadership and You

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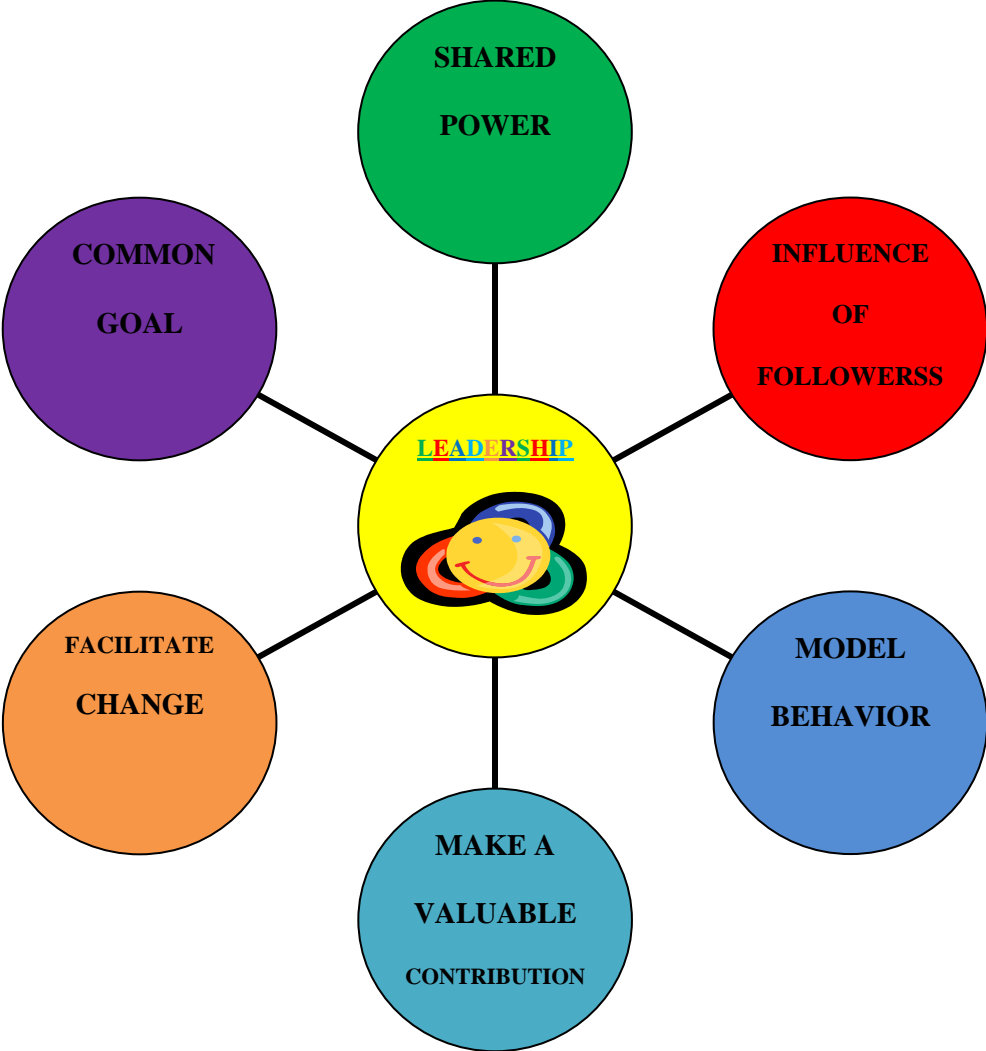
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Introduction

My personal definition of leadership is multi-faceted. A leader can be described by characteristics, or traits in their personality, or a leader can be described as an individual who inspires others to obtain a common objective. The latter description is that of a process which occurs between an individual and those who follow. Leadership does not occur to a single individual, it occurs within a group context, and is comprised of influence (Northouse, 2012). The ability to create change requires influence for the process to culminate. Influence is demonstrated by leaders when a commitment to the needs and concerns of others is demonstrated in action, word, and deed (Kouzes& Posner, 2012). This commitment reflects the ethical decision to do what one says he or she will do, to exercise reliability and honesty, and to move toward a goal. People are drawn toward knowledge and skill, and can assign the title of leader to an individual. This is emergent leadership, and if the title and role are given to a person through a formal position this is called assigned leadership. Whether emergent or assigned, the importance is a true leader, and true leadership is based solely on what the person does (Kouzes& Posner, 2012). Leadership personally, is based on strong ethical principles concerning how to live my life. Realistically, the term leader is used in seedy group contexts, which involve using either position power or personal power to coerce people, and to commit acts against humanity. As long as a person becomes the identified model for a group identity they are often erroneously referred to as a leader (Northouse, 2012). To me, true leadership involves shared power, influence of followers achieved by modeled and demonstrated behavior that is a valuable contribution, constructive to change and flexible, and moving in a direction toward a common goal.



Analysis

Daft (2014) identified a new innovative approach to management as creating opportunities to move outcomes in a new direction. He defined this concept as a “new manager” (p. 37). New managers reflect leadership, and leadership encompasses the ability to engage, to use active listening, to motivate, assess, analyze, guide, and challenge a group to meet a common goal. Engaging others toward a common goal increases the motivation of peers to influence change and self-awareness is required to effectively lead, influence, and motivate others in achieving a goal. Having a positive attitude is a key skill that demonstrates leadership. Maintaining awareness that perceptions can be deceiving assists leaders in reminding self to promote concise modeling and demonstration of desired behaviors. The leader is not promoting personal goals but action to achieve an agreed upon goal. When a leader makes judgments without taking the time to consider what other persons may be experiencing internally or externally, it is a disservice to the followers, the leader, and the common goal.

Credibility is the lifeline of leadership. Leaders function as role models, exercise fairness in their role and demonstrate passion focused on a common goal the leader shares with his or her followers. These functions contribute heavily toward the credibility of a leader. To do what one says one will do, and to confidently exercise competency in skill and knowledge are key factors in establishing credibility. The evidence of a leader is based in what he or she actually does.

Example

Creativity and open-mindedness are characteristics of a leader and factors that contribute to innovation. An implication of showing group members they are valued increases the credibility of the leader, empowerment of others, and serves as a bridge which leads to followers believing the messenger and in turn believing the message. Providing others with confidence

bolsters individual and organizational creativity. This process provides the leader with an edge over competition due to heightened group satisfaction which improves the credibility of the leader and the common goal. Leadership also contributes to instigating a culture of change and innovation. Leadership is present within any group sharing a common goal or within any organization. The concept of sustainable development cannot occur without leadership. “This recent emergence of interest is a result of the recognition that creativity and innovation are necessary for organizational adaptation and survival” (Reiter-Palmon, 2011, p.1).

A leader that exemplifies my definition of leadership is my grandfather, Benjamin James McAllister, Sr. My grandfather initiated community and social services in the 1950’s, 60’s, and 70’s in Southern Illinois. What makes him an exemplary leader is the fact he managed to gain the credibility and support of community members near and far, despite critical racial and economic conflict happening nationwide. My grandfather was an African-American man who created innovative community service projects, activities, and a community center in Lebanon, Illinois. His initial efforts were targeted for seniors and children with no reference to race, political or social standing, or economic class; they were simply services to assist anyone who needed the help. In other words, if the client is rich, but has no one to assist with picking up medications, the same service was provided as was provided to families with no money or vehicle. Benjamin McAllister Sr. engaged everyone with fairness and demonstrated shared power and dignified behavior. Upon his death the street where the third generation family home is located was dedicated in his name, as well as a playground for the children in the area.

Benjamin McAllister, Sr. dedicated his life, his family, and his work toward helping others. He was honest, true to his word, and committed to change without creating further conflict or division. He was an emergent leader and eventually an assigned leader as a result of

the attention, respect, and love of the greater community. As a leader, he conducted personal and professional interactions with passion and care for others. The goal of providing large scale assistance in a grass-roots organized manner was a new concept. He created the Neighborhood Opportunity Centers (NOC) which evolved and were implemented nationally by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., as Equal Opportunity Centers (EOC).

Application

The leadership my grandfather demonstrated is something I attempt to emulate daily in my personal and professional life. I attempt to conduct myself with dignity, and to treat others with fairness. I practice honesty, and a lifestyle of service to others in my daily interactions. I am committed to providing guidance, support, and unified effort toward reaching the goals of the clients I work with, and the organization I work for. On a much larger scale, I would like to emulate the fearless composure and total commitment my grandfather displayed in his effort to make a positive contribution to society.

References

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