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Leadership: Three Key Employee-Centered Elements With Case Studies

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**Innovations in pharmacy* is publishing “Leadership: Three Key Employee-Centered Elements With Case Studies” as a four-part series.

Introduction

The purpose of this book is to explain the three employee-centered elements of leadership—connection, gratitude, and responsiveness. In our organizational lives, we yearn for true leadership. We bemoan the impotence of leadership in our social, civic, and religious organizations, in our government, and in our workplaces. Although Kouzes and Posner claim that “love is the soul of leadership,”¹ we do not go to work each day seeking love. We seek leadership. We want to fill the leadership void with people who are effective and produce desired effects.

However, this book is not about emotional intelligence (EI). That is the ability to identify, assess, and control the emotions of oneself, of others, and of groups.

Nor is this book about servant leadership. That is a broad management philosophy that implies a comprehensive view of the quality of people, work, and community spirit.

Nor is this book a miniature version of Stephen Covey’s *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. Covey presents a complex, research-based framework for personal and professional effectiveness.²

So this book does not pretend to challenge the power, structure, or validity of the emotional-intelligence philosophy, the servant-leadership model, or the seven habits. It merely describes three employee-centered elements, which when judiciously and continuously applied, improve a leader’s chances of driving meaningful and enduring change.

The three employee-centered elements—connection, gratitude, and responsiveness—appear limited in scope, almost inadequate, but they are deceiving. Each element encompasses a wide range of skills, traits, and qualities. The three elements represent a mnemonic, which when accessed, opens a window into human-relations leadership—a window that might otherwise be closed.

The challenge is to devise an employee-centered triad—three sets of behaviors that don’t necessarily compose the complete range of human-relations behaviors but provide a substantial start on the road to success. Such behaviors are not only meaningful in themselves, but they also provide a

foundation on which to build. Application of the triad throughout an organization promotes consistency of approach to human relations, shapes the priorities, and fuels cultural uniformity.

The remainder of this document focuses on how leaders can use the triad to work with employees and engage them to drive change.

Chapter 1: The Essence and Nature of Leadership

Historian David McCullough’s book, *The Great Bridge*, tells the story of the Roebling family in New York City. John Roebling, the Roebling patriarch, was a German-born and German-trained bridge engineer. After a series of pre- and post-Civil War successes, Roebling promoted his design of a bridge to connect lower Manhattan with Brooklyn over the East River—a bridge to fuel the population and economic growth of Brooklyn.³

After navigating political and financial obstacles, John Roebling crushed his foot while surveying the site, contracted tetanus, and died soon after. His son, Washington Roebling, grasped the leadership baton and assumed the role of chief engineer to execute his father’s design.

Early in the construction, tragedy struck Washington when he contracted caisson disease (the “bends”) working at the construction site. Sickly and disabled, Washington retreated to his apartment in Brooklyn Heights, which overlooked the area. Determined not to allow the project to falter, Washington and his wife, Emily, became a storied professional partnership. Emily “stepped in and provided the critical written link between her husband and the engineers.”⁴ On May 24, 1883, Emily and Washington Roebling witnessed the joyous opening of the Brooklyn Bridge.

The story of the Roeblings exemplifies the shared execution of what we are calling the “change triad”—1) creating a

vision; 2) having confidence in the vision and in oneself to execute the vision; 3) and acting on that vision.

John Roebling created the vision of the bridge. He had confidence in the vision and in his ability to execute it, but he was unable to act. Rather, Washington, with confidence in his father's vision and in his own ability to execute it, assumed the leadership role. And finally, Emily, with confidence in her husband and in her own ability as confidant and conduit, teamed with her husband to act on the vision and convert it into the monumental reality that it remains today. All three Roeblings were leaders.

What Is a Leader or Leadership?

Note the following six definitions of *leaders* or *leadership*:

- "Leadership is taking people to places they've never been before."⁵ — Marie Kane
- "Leadership is the process of influencing the activities of an organized group toward goal achievement."⁶ — C. F. Rauch and O. Behling
- "The leader is one who mobilizes others toward a goal shared by leaders and followers. Leaders, followers, and goals make up the three equally necessary supports for leadership."⁷ — Garry Wills
- "Great leaders rally people to a better future."⁸ — Marcus Buckingham
- "The fundamental purpose of leadership is to produce useful change, especially non-incremental change."⁹ — John Kotter
- "Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal."¹⁰ — Peter Northouse

The definitions above are clear, strong, and meaningful, but Peter Northouse's definition captures the essence of leadership. He infuses an ethical component: the leader influences rather than dictates. Ken Blanchard agrees: "The key to successful leadership today is influence, not authority."¹¹

In the second part of his definition, Northouse infuses a participative component: the leader works to achieve a common goal, one jointly agreed upon.

Modern thinking embraces both notions. First, a good leader applies influence throughout the change process, and second, he or she tries to achieve a common goal. Ken Blanchard states, "Leadership is not something you do to people. It's something you do with people."¹²

Therefore, if leaders are enlightened, the process is a joint effort to achieve a common goal. In fact, good leadership is a process that achieves a goal.

Leaders Drive Change

Leaders create change. Jeffrey Immelt, the chief executive officer of General Electric, says, "Great leaders drive change."¹³ His statement will serve as our operational definition. Because Immelt's adjective *great* and his verb *drive* add loftiness, passion, and style, the result is more inspiring than the bland alternative, "Leaders create change" or the version offered by Rick Pitino, present head basketball coach of the University of Louisville Cardinals: "Leadership is all about change."¹⁴ John Maxwell agrees with Immelt but turns Immelt's statement upside down. Maxwell states, "No great leader in history has fought to prevent change."¹⁵

Immelt's definition mirrors Peter Drucker's assertion that "management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things."¹⁶ Naturally, if the "right things" differ from the current state, then leaders drive change to achieve the right things. Abraham Lincoln drove change from slavery to freedom and from secession to unity. Mohandas Gandhi drove change from occupation to independence. Martin Luther King Jr. drove change from oppression to tolerance.

Although great leaders drive change, great leaders do not drive change recklessly. They manage the purpose and rate of change. Lincoln, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King Jr. were acutely aware of this. Lincoln's goal of the "Emancipation Proclamation" was unquestioned, and his timing was legendary. Gandhi's quest for an independent India was accomplished through patient but persistent nonviolence. But Martin Luther King Jr. bemoaned the lack of progress toward his dream. He cried, "One hundred years later [after the "Emancipation Proclamation"], the Negro is still languishing in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land."¹⁷

An appealing characteristic of Immelt's definition is the lowercase *l* in *leaders*. He implies that each of us, even those with titles that do not begin with uppercase letters, such as nurse, shortstop, or school-board member, can drive consequential change. The concept of being a small *l* leader (emergent leadership) as opposed to big *L* (assigned leadership) is empowering. It encourages action despite the absence of an impressive title, high salary, or corner office. Emergent leadership negates the notion that workers, team members, or customers have no responsibility or authority to drive change. Emergent leaders are not indifferent observers or passive participants.

In the leadership game, all can be coaches or managers in addition to being spectators or players. Celtics coach Rick Pitino says, “Ever since I came to the Boston Celtics in 1997, I have been looking for some players who are going to become leaders. From the great Celtics teams of the eighties with Larry Bird, to the Lakers of the same era, to the Chicago Bulls with Michael Jordan, a common thread running through these teams was the presence of great leadership on the court. Bird, Magic, and Jordan were not just great basketball players. They were great leaders as well—to the point that if teammates did not work hard in practice, *they* would get on them. These great players constantly reinforced the coach's principles and strategies.”¹⁸

Mother Teresa said, “Do not wait for leaders; do it alone, person to person.”¹⁹ Comedienne Lily Tomlin offers the same sentiment with a humorous twist: “I always wondered why somebody doesn't do something about that. Then I realized I was somebody.”²⁰ By doing Mother Teresa's *it* or Lily Tomlin's *that*, we become leaders ourselves. Leadership is not the sole domain of a president, chief executive officer, director, or reverend.

There are alternatives to the driving-change theme of leadership. Maybe a “component of the theme” is a better representation. John Kotter claims that leadership is “about coping with change,”²¹ professing a need to be adaptive and nimble. Jim Calhoun, coach of the 2011 National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) champion University of Connecticut Husky men's basketball team, claims that “good leaders sell change,” conveying the wisdom of inclusion.²² In fact, leaders probably do all three (*drive, cope, sell*) depending upon the leader's style and circumstances, but “driving change” is preferred because it embodies excitement, which propels us to a better future.

Vision

Great leaders drive change by:

1. Creating a vision
2. Embodying confidence in the vision and in oneself to execute the vision
3. Exemplifying a propensity to act on that vision. Tom Peters refers to this step as a “bias for action.”²³

Warren Bennis supports this mobilizing “change” triad by asserting, “Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality. Vision, step 1; capacity, step 2; reality, step 3.”²⁴

Each step of the change triad encompasses a literature of its own, especially when creating a vision—a mental model of an ideal future state. Some leaders promote vision as the key to organizational change. Theodore Hesburgh agrees: “The very

essence of leadership is that you have to have vision.”²⁵ In the leadership sense, vision is usually broad, towering, and transformational, but the change triad works just as well when the vision is a goal or an objective—specific, less ambitious, and incremental.

Some offer an existential approach to vision. Existential thought proclaims, “You have to bear responsibility for making your way through life and creating some kind of meaning for it.”²⁶ Peter Zarlenga proclaims, “To come to be you must have a vision of Being, a Dream, a Purpose, a Principle. You will become what your vision is.”²⁷ Oprah Winfrey expresses the same: “Create the highest, grandest vision possible for your life because you become what you believe.”²⁸ Zarlenga and Winfrey present a vision as a prerequisite for *being* and *becoming*.

Translated to leadership, the leader is compelled to form a vision with and for the organization. The *you* in, “You will become what your vision is,” or “You become what you believe” can be your organization.

However, a connection between the vision and the outcome of being is not absolute. Mike Vance and Diane Deacon, proponents of creative thinking, admit that although we are taught to believe that “the human spirit is indomitable and can accomplish virtually anything, logicians will add that we can do nothing outside the realm of truth and reality.”²⁹ Nevertheless, acting with the premise of the connection between the vision and the outcome is more than just constructive. It is empowering and likely predictive, which justifies its prevalence in inspirational literature and speeches. The poet Shel Silverstein casts the message for children.³⁰

“Listen to the mustn'ts, child. Listen to the don'ts. Listen to the shouldn'ts, the impossibles, the won'ts. Listen to the never haves, then listen close to me. Anything can happen, child. Anything can be.”—Shel Silverstein

As important as vision is, it is only the first step. The domino metaphor is not useful. If vision is the first domino, it is not true that once the first domino falls, the other dominos will fall and change will ensue. Antoine de Saint-Exupery, author of *The Little Prince*, wrote, “A rock pile ceases to be a rock pile the moment a single man contemplates it, bearing within him the image of a cathedral.”³¹ Well, not quite. In spite of his inspirational message, visions must grow two legs—confidence and action.

Confidence

According to the dictionary, confidence is a “belief in oneself and one’s powers and abilities.” Stuart Levine maintains that the foundation for confidence is a person’s value system.³²

Confidence in one’s own value system produces a confident persona as well as a confidence for making decisions and taking action. Confidence is a commonly listed leadership trait, and, in fact, is one of the four positive psychological capacities of the authentic leadership model—the others being hope, optimism, and resilience. Cicero links confidence to change, and he says, “Confidence is that feeling by which the mind embarks in great and honorable courses with a sure hope and trust in itself.”³³

Step two mandates a confidence in the vision in addition to a confidence in oneself. Jesse Jackson’s rhythmical quotation addresses confidence in a vision as “something my heart can believe.” He declares, “If my mind can conceive it, and my heart can believe it, I know I can achieve it.”³⁴ President Harry Truman is more pragmatic than Jackson but still hopeful, “Believe and you’re halfway there.”³⁵

Action

Step three depicts an intrinsic, natural tendency to go for it, get it done, and bring it home. Catherine Pulsifer, glass artist and author, says, “The dreams I only thought about, the ones I took no action on, well, they are still dreams. But the ones that I took action on, they are now a reality.”³⁶ Steps one and two are fruitless without step three. In fact, according to Pablo Picasso, “Action is the foundational key to all success.”³⁷

Below are five quotations that promote the action-oriented approach:

- “There comes a moment when you have to stop revving up the car and shove it into gear.”³⁸ — David Mahoney
- “What is the purpose of a plan if we do not work it?”³⁹ — John Wanamaker
- “Nothing will ever be attempted if all possible objections must first be overcome.”⁴⁰ — Samuel Johnson
- “All truth passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as being self-evident.”⁴¹ — Arnold Schopenhauer
- “A man would do nothing if he waited until he could do it so well that no one could find fault.”⁴² — Cardinal John Henry Newman

Roslyn Carter, recognizing the adversity and challenges that face the leader who is determined to drive change, combines steps two and three: “You have to have confidence in your ability and then be tough enough to follow through.”⁴³

The Eight-Stage Process

The adopted three-step change triad omits the process of implementing change, which can be viewed as a management function, but it is more commonly viewed as an amalgamation of leadership and management. Kotter’s “eight-stage process” of making (“driving”) change depicts this amalgamation:

1. Establishing a sense of urgency
2. Forming a powerful guiding coalition
3. Creating a vision
4. Communicating the vision
5. Empowering others to act on the vision
6. Planning for and creating short-term wins
7. Consolidating improvements and producing still more change
8. Institutionalizing new approaches⁴⁴

Kotter’s process is admittedly richer than the three-step approach. Some elements overlap, but his process has eight steps, burdened by the memory and recall challenges associated with eight steps instead of the change triad’s three steps.

Although the leader may serve as the visionary, the catalyst, and the champion, an enlightened environment mandates that the followers participate in the change process. Among the variety of leadership theories and approaches, such as the triad approach, the skills approach, style approach, situational approach, contingency theory, leader-member exchange theory, transformational leadership, authentic leadership, team leadership, and the ethical approach (including servant leadership), all enlist employees significantly.

The leadership imperative to involve employees has many origins. One has an ethical base; it is the right thing to do. Actions that promote participation and equity have powerful ethical overtones. Another is pragmatic; employee involvement molds the quality of the outcome. In 2001, Douglas Conant, the newly designated chief executive officer (CEO) of Campbell Soups, noticed that “employee engagement had tanked.” He sought to reverse that immediately because of his staunch belief that high performance hinged upon high engagement.⁴⁵

Vance and Deacon suggest, “Involvement is the primary method for inculcating a caring attitude into our characters. When you want to develop the positive attributes of a caring person, such as passion, commitment, tenacity, and dedication, the secret is to get the person or persons involved. It isn’t enough to make people feel part of something; they must become part of something.”⁴⁶ The path from feeling to becoming is evolutionary and can mimic a magical mystery tour. It takes a menagerie of nouns to make the journey: patience, persistence, energy, commitment, and sacrifice. As the child becomes the adult or the larvae becomes the butterfly, the collection of individuals morph into a different entity—an effective team. Employees gel and soar when they are integral to change.

The nature of the leader-follower relationship is a vital component of becoming part of something. One of the most important relationships in the workplace is that of leader and follower. Indira Gandhi ponders, “I suppose that leadership at one time meant muscles; but today it means getting along with people.”⁴⁷

The core of the leader-follower relationship is human relations. Katz depicts the human-relations skill set as one of the three personal skill sets that define effective leadership—the other two being technical and conceptual.⁴⁸ He contends that conceptual skill dominates technical skill in importance at the top management level and that technical skill dominates conceptual skill at the supervisory level (see figure). But the human-relations pillar is equally important at all three levels of management—supervisory (front line), middle management, and top management.

Skills Needed—Skills Approach			
Top Management		Human	Conceptual
	Technical		
Middle Management	Technical	Human	Conceptual
Supervisory Management	Technical	Human	
			Conceptual

P. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*. p. 41.
Figure 3.1

A reasonable premise is that technical expertise is a prerequisite for promoting technical/clinical personnel, e.g., engineers, nurses, and construction workers, into leadership roles. In 1969, educator Laurence J. Peter proposed, “In a

hierarchy, every employee tends to rise to his level of incompetence.”⁴⁹ If the “Peter principle” is valid, and if promotions are based significantly on technical competence, then incompetence stems from deficiencies related to nontechnical aspects. Because conceptual skills are less important for the frontline manager, the human-relations skills are pivotal. Technical personnel often lack formal human-relations training when promoted, so all but the most talented often fall short. They either struggle to meet performance standards, retreat to their former positions, or leave the organization, either voluntarily or involuntarily.

The human-relations field is vast. Many leaders desire to be accomplished at human relations, but the practical challenges of immersing themselves into this vastness are daunting. The fact that many hesitate or stall doesn’t render their desire disingenuous.

Some organizations provide internal training—well-intended attempts to infuse human-relations skills quickly and increase the likelihood of a successful transition from peer to supervisor. But how is the information best packaged and presented? W. J. King and James Skakoon assert that “the faculty for reducing apparently complicated situations to their basic, essential elements is a form of wisdom. Make it your practice to integrate, condense, summarize, and simplify your facts, rather than expand, ramify, complicate, and disintegrate them.”⁵⁰

In this spirit, the reader can explore three popular and enduring summaries of human-relations leadership: Spears,⁵¹ Sipe and Frick’s⁵² and Li’s.⁵³ Spears outlines ten principles of servant leadership, and Sipe and Frick offer seven pillars of servant leadership, both based on Robert Greenleaf’s writings.⁵⁴ Li outlines five new rules of open leadership. But the search persists. After applying talent analytics, Google’s Project Oxygen, “so named because good management keeps the company alive,” recently devised “eight behaviors that characterize good managers.”^{55, 56, 57}

Because research shows that memory decreases considerably after three-to-five elements,⁵⁸ the challenge is to simplify the human-relations aspect from the ten principles, seven pillars, and five rules to three memorable elements. The power of the triad is intriguing. Although it’s not entirely clear why three rather than two or four or more should be the iconic grouping, the ability of humans to register and recall a set of three could be a key reason. Examples include the arts trilogies: (*Godfather*; *Lord of the Rings*); literature (*The Three Musketeers*; *Three Blind Mice*); music (The Bee Gees; The Supremes); religion and spirituality (the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit); popular culture (The Three Stooges); business

(AAA®, IBM®, AT&T®); and history and politics (“The Gettysburg Address”: “of the people, by the people, for the people”) (“The Declaration of Independence”: “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”).

The challenge is to devise an employee-centered triad—three sets of behaviors that don’t necessarily compose the complete range of human-relations behaviors but provide a substantial start on the road to success—behaviors that are meaningful by themselves and also provide a foundation to build upon.

The employee-centered triad’s simplicity has liabilities and assets. Admittedly, a loss of completeness occurs. But the simplicity promotes understanding and recall of the elements, so leaders are more apt to apply them. Application of the triad throughout an organization promotes consistency of approach to human relations, shapes the priorities, and fuels cultural uniformity.

Driving Change

There is one more question to answer: Why drive change? Are we driving change solely to become more efficient or more effective, to become more prestigious or more profitable, or to augment programs and services? Does a common mission unify all leaders, regardless of their businesses, jobs, or disciplines, regardless of each organization’s vision, mission, and values? Do leaders have a common mission regardless of whether they lead clerks, nurses, or construction workers—regardless of whether their employees fill orders, wipe brows, or insert steel beams? Is there a higher-level, common mission, a sense of purpose that all leaders can recall during moments of adversity and triumph? Does a sense of purpose deeply affect and inspire leaders beyond the meaning and rewards associated with the visions, goals, and objectives?

The Wilson Challenge

Woodrow Wilson, the twenty-eighth president of the United States, provided this sense of purpose. In three short sentences, he made a unifying declaration that challenges us to recognize and pursue a higher-level, common mission.

“You are not here merely to make a living. You are here in order to enable the world to live more amply, with greater vision, and with a finer spirit of hope and achievement. You are here to enrich the world, and you impoverish yourself if you forget the errand.”⁵⁹ — Woodrow Wilson

Wilson recognized that most of us work to make a living, but he clearly stated a nobler, broader mission: “to enable the world to live more amply.”

Wilson challenges us to define our world. Lincoln’s world encompassed slaves and citizens of the United States of America; Gandhi’s world involved the British and the East Indians; and Martin Luther King Jr.’s world focused on American blacks and whites. As leaders of organizations, our world need not be as expansive. Our world may comprise board members, colleagues, employees, customers, vendors, clients, members, congregants, students, or our patients.

Then, Wilson completed the circle. After he told us that we are “not here merely to make a living,” that we are here “to enable the world to live more amply,” he implored us not to “forget the errand” lest we “impoverish” ourselves. He reminded us that our efforts are not entirely altruistic, and that beyond the self-centered benefit of making a living, accepting Wilson’s challenge rewards each of us with a profound sense of fulfillment.

Combating Three Signs of a Miserable Job

In 2007, Patrick Lencioni published *The Three Signs of a Miserable Job*. He defines a miserable job as one that “makes a person cynical and frustrated and demoralized when he/she goes home at night.”⁶⁰ He identifies three signs: anonymity, irrelevance, and immeasurement. According to Lencioni: “Anonymity is the feeling that employees get when they realize that their manager has little interest in them.”⁶¹ Mother Teresa agreed. “The most terrible poverty is loneliness and the feeling of being unloved.”⁶²

Lencioni wrote, “Irrelevance takes root when employees cannot see how their jobs make a difference in the lives of others.”⁶³ Publisher Katharine Graham voiced the same opinion: “To love what you do and feel it matters—how can anything be more fun?”⁶⁴

Lencioni said, “Immeasurement is the inability of employees to assess for themselves their contribution or success.”⁶⁵ David Novak agreed when he said, “People are moved by what is truly measured.”⁶⁶

Each of the three employee-centered elements combats one or more of the three signs of a miserable job.

Traits and Skills

Although traits and skills that enable leadership success are excluded from Jeffrey Immelt’s definition that “great leaders drive change,” traits and skills occupy a considerable portion of leadership research, thought, and text. Skills are abilities

that can be acquired and developed, but traits tend to be innate, “hard-wired” characteristics. Although writing and speaking are skills, and dependability and assertiveness are traits, some scholars contend that talent plays a role in the former and diligence and determination develop the latter.

Authors categorize traits and skills differently. Whereas Gary Yukl⁶⁷ and Peter Northouse⁶⁸ describe traits and skills as separate entities, Marie Kane⁶⁹ and John Gardner⁷⁰ combine the traits and skills into one list of attributes. John Maxwell⁶⁷ combines the traits and skills into one list of “indispensable qualities.” John Zenger, Joseph Folkman, and Scott Edinger list sixteen “leadership competencies” that correlate strongly with positive business outcomes.⁶⁸

Many scholars reject the notion that a specific skill or trait or set of skills or traits is necessary for effective leadership. They emphasize some and de-emphasize others. Not only that, many acknowledge that leadership is situational, that is, traits and skills that contribute to success in one situation might falter in another.⁶⁹ The accomplished leader must be agile, applying different sets of traits and skills, depending upon the constituency, the setting, the importance, the sense of urgency, and the goal. In a broader sense, traits and skills that contribute to success in one discipline, business type, or profession might not work in another. Most of the generals who became president were abject failures. Ulysses S. Grant famously stated, “War and politics are so different.”⁷⁰

Notes

Introduction

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