

Wanted Leaders

What is this “thing” called Leadership? Why is Leadership at a premium? Who or what is Leadership all about? Style? Content? Something else? Families need and seek Leadership. All kinds of organization need and seek Leadership. Government need and seek Leadership. Nations need and seek Leadership. Is it a rare, scarce commodity? Where does it come from? Who has it? Who does not?

Here are some thoughts and ideas which help to understand and define Leadership. A combination of different qualities, to be found in person in different degrees. Not one formula or prescription.

First, Leadership is not about “self-first”. Its about “others first”. A self – centered, selfish person can rarely be a true sustainable Leader. Perhaps, in the short – term until others see through. But, A selfless person always can be a Leader. Someone who works for others. Someone who is driven by an agenda beyond self.

Second, Leadership is not about materialism and commercialism. These can be byproducts especially in business but these can never be the driving force in a Leader of quality. Money, material gains are excessively visible signs and symbols of success today but that’s not necessary an outcome of true leadership. Strong entrepreneurship certainly which is different.

Third, “giving” is very important. Sharing. Large – heartedness. Not ‘taking’. Generosity, reaching out are the stuff of leaders and their ability to move people, create emotion and response. People turn to those who ‘give’. People turn away from those who ‘take’.

Fourth, integrity is a critical fact of Leadership. Those who break and bend the rules are not respected. And, if respect is not there, Leadership is not there. Fear maybe, but without respect, there is not true Leadership Integrity evokes and commands respect. Integrity is part and parcel of Leadership.

Fifth, Common sense is enormously important. Simple common sense. Indefinable, Intangible. But, very special to Leadership. Often, Common sense, a difficult to define quality, is a very strong part of the makeup of persons with Leadership traits.

Sixth, Instinct – a sixth sense – a seventh sense. Not quantifiable. Not visible. No time to think. No time to work out the pros and cons. Only time to follow instincts. A gut feeling. Unique to Leadership. Everyone has instinct. Everyone does not necessarily follow their instinct. Everyone needs to instinct is not to be confused with impulse.

Seventh, Conscience. An accountability to oneself – not only to others. Reporting not to anyone other than self. Looking in the mirror and rendering an account to the person in the mirror – self. There was a question recently regarding a CEO position – who does one report to? The response – to no one, to everyone , to oneself. Most of all to oneself. That’s Leadership.

Eighth, 'people' skills. To be good with people. Specially subordinates. It's easy to be "good" with persons and superiors and people external. But, how does one deal with those with less or no power? How does one conduct oneself without drawing on position and authority? The ability to connect to people's hearts and minds irrespective of hierarchy and 'level'. That's Leadership.

Ninth, to be able to communicate. To be able to express clearly and simply – ideas, thoughts, whatever. Without jargon. Without complexity. Easy to understand. Easy to relate to. Leadership, today, calls for being able to communicate and to be reasonably articulate (not necessarily eloquent).

Tenth, to listen (to others). So that communication is 2- way, not 1 – way. The ability to listen is very special because a person is always moved and motivated by a good listener. Rapport is automatic. This is a quality very special to Leadership. To give the other person a good, patient hearing. It makes a huge difference.

Eleventh, to be entrepreneurial. To be able to take Risk. To take calculated chances. Not just to play safe. This is not about being rash but about thinking through and taking next steps which are important to growth, to development, to moving ahead. That is Leadership.

Twelfth, to have courage. Not to be afraid. To be unafraid. To be secure. And, therefore, to pass this on to others to have courage, to be secure. The ability to do things which are not easy. Which are challenging. Which are beyond the ordinary. That is Leadership.

Thirteen, to be reasonably intelligent. Too much is not needed. Too little can be a problem. Most people have it. It's nothing rare. But, it's essential to leaderships, because it enables understanding. It enables rational thinking.

Fourteenth, to be strategic. To have a broad sense of direction, the path ahead. To have some sense of vision. To have foresight and also be able to look at issues in a comprehensive way as to what's possible, what is not. Leadership is special in this respect.

Fifteenth, to understand others and to be sensitive not just to oneself – which is easy and natural – but to others' needs, pain, issues, concerns. This is a special quality of Leadership. Everyone is sensitive to one's own concerns, pains, hurts. To be aware of the pain of others is what Leadership is about.

Sixteenth, to be "national" and, even, "international" in one's thinking, ideas, awareness. In this time of increasing globalization, Leadership needs to understand the country and the world, the trends, the underlying indicators of movements and to assess their significance. This is specially important for Leadership of organizations which are national and or global in character.

Seventeenth, Humility. Very important. To remember that one is only human. Mortal. Ordinary. That a human is not all powerful, omnipotent. There is something beyond. Something which ensures that an individual is, eventually, just an ordinary person, not extraordinary. Not superhuman. Never forget humility.

Eighteenth, to be a consensus builder. To bring people together. To keep people together. To be able to manage conflicts and differences between people. This is also Leadership.

Nineteenth, to be strong. Mentally, spiritually. Not physically strong but an inner strength which enables a person to take on responsibility, to have broad shoulders, figuratively cold.

There could be other qualities. This is just illustrative.

The question ; is there such a man or woman who can combine in himself or herself all of these qualities. There are many people who combine in themselves these facts in different measures and different degrees. There is no single formula or prescription.

And, ordinary people can be extraordinary leaders given the opportunity and the trust to show their worth.

And, there is no one model. The Jack Welch model is only one. The Lal Bahadur Shastri model is another. And, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawahar Lal Nehru, Nelson Mandela, JRD Tata, and so many others. Leadership is not just about political leaders or corporate leaders. Leaders of great standing come from all walks of life. Aruna Roy, Bunker Roy and Ela Bhatt are Leaders of quality from the voluntary sector. Dr. S Radhakrishnan was a great Teacher – Leader.

Leadership is seen at all levels. Top down and bottom up. A village – level leader. A school principal. An institution head. A corporate chieftain. A departmental head. A unit head. A class teacher. A doctor. A Ngo head. Its not something for the rich and mighty. Its very much for the grass – roots and up. And, if the environment is right, leadership can be seen in very ordinary people, fulfilling very important role.