

Leadership Philosophy

John W. McDowell

March 18, 2010

Leadership centers on Vision, Respect, and Optimism. There are many other characteristics and traits that make up a quality leader, all of which I believe are built upon and provide the foundation for the three I mentioned above.

A leader needs to have a vision which charts the course towards the future. In order to do this they must be creative and draw on the knowledge and insight of their peers. Once this vision is developed, it must be communicated in such a way as to get the team motivated around it. While this motivation may already exist within the individuals, it must be accented by the leader. Leadership will then focus this motivation towards the organizational and personal mission/goals.

Respect, which is misunderstood by so many people, must be earned every day. Although respect comes in many different flavors, I am only going to focus on earning it as I believe it captures all aspects. In order to command respect on a daily basis you must gain the admiration of your peers, subordinates, and supervisors. This is done through respecting them first; by understanding their needs, valuing their opinion, leveraging their diversity, and trusting their judgment to make sound decisions. I always assume noble intent and employ a philosophy that was used on me early in my career, "Give them the authority up front and tighten up the reins only when necessary." This shows that one has the faith that others will not abuse the authority while at the same time providing the flexibility to get the job done. Mistakes will happen along the way and is important how they are viewed and dealt with by the leadership. Assuming noble intent upfront until a fair assessment is performed is an important step in determining route cause and effect. I never jump to conclusions and ensure that all the facts are considered before making a decision related to corrective action.

Optimism provides the positive energy/force to consistently move forward. By changing a few words one can raise the energy levels of a team several notches. Realism needs to be factored in along the voyage and the positive energy must be constantly flowing. Over optimism may breed false hopes so it must be measured and focused along the journey. Dedication to follow through to the end is an important aspect of any goal and requires a certain amount of optimism. Along the way there will be bumps, walls, potholes, and other distractions. While these can make one disheartened there must be encouragement along the way. Any journey is a learning experience and failures need to be recognized as learning, although at times leadership may need to provide guidance to protect against catastrophic failure. When I give someone a task I give them the full authority and my backing to move forward with the understanding that they may come back to me for advice as needed. Additionally they have leeway to make decisions on the way ahead as long as the overall effort remains on schedule, within budget, maintains safety, and supports the intended goal.

In summary I believe a leader needs to have a vision of where they need to go, the respect of the people around them, and the optimism to continuously follow through to the end.