

The Leadership Balance

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LEADERSHIP...We often ignore the subject, making the risky assumption that those in positions of leadership must have leadership skills. But even if they do, what about the rest of us? Stephen Covey and others make a strong case that to thrive, or even survive, in the changing business environment of today, people at every level within an organization must assume leadership roles. Are you a leader? Do you know how to lead? Do the people under your supervision know how to be effective leaders?

This article (and the book, *Confessions of a Management Consultant Turned CEO*) gives a fresh perspective on leadership.

Our new book was born during a dinner conversation in which I was describing my experiences as a new CEO. I was excited about my opportunity to practice what I had been preaching for many years as a consultant—the Deming Philosophy of Management.

I had to confess that the whole thing was harder than I had imagined it would be and that during many of my actions and decisions I could hear Dr. Deming in the back of my head saying, “Now Anita, you know better than that!” And I did! I did know better, but caught in the situation of the moment, I did some of those “forbidden” things anyway.

It was not easy to be ultimately and completely responsible for creating and sustaining the growth of the employees and the company as a whole. The buck, when it stopped, was heavier than I thought it would be.

I bring a strong foundation in Deming’s philosophy to my consulting work. But the lessons inherent in my experience as a CEO were also validated by a wide range of leadership philosophies: people like Victor Frankl, Leo Buscaglia, Dr. Yoshinori Iizuka, Peter Scholtes, and Brian Joiner. Taken globally, I believe that the essence of effective leadership is the ability to balance many components simultaneously, including the human and financial sides of the business. My focus in this book has been on balancing the management of the processes with the management of the people—the human treasure of the organization. I believe it is important for leaders to focus on the human side of the business and expect financial success to be the natural outgrowth.

Leadership is an individual’s ability to move others toward a common vision and to gain their commitment to making that vision a reality. W.C.H. Prentice wrote:

Leadership is the accomplishment of a goal
through the direction of human assistants.

You know you’re a leader when others are going in the direction you suggest, when they seem excited about achieving the goal, and when they are contributing their creative and productive energies to the process.

Leaders maintain motivation in an organization by balancing the focus on the people and the

focus on financial results. This balance can be compared to the traditional see-saw. It is, however, more complex: multidimensional with many facets—like a holographic picture. Let's begin with the simple see-saw analogy, adding the complexity as we go.

The see-saw balance places the people dimension on one side and the financial dimension on the other. The leader can be seen as the fulcrum. Now take a look at the facets of each component. The balance often takes the form of:

- coaching while making decisions,
- dealing with unique individuals while treating everyone fairly,
- allowing human error while expecting demonstrated learning through changed behavior.

We must also add the nature of the leader who acts as the fulcrum. A leader's personal commitment to the vision, and his or her ability to engage the organization in that vision, is influenced by things like:

- a knowledge of the industry and its customers,
- the flexibility to adapt to the organizational culture,
- an understanding of Variation Theory,
- a personal style,
- a willingness to learn and grow.

Each of these characteristics influences how balance is achieved.

Now we add another dimension—variation. Variation is inherent in all systems and processes. The issue is again one of balance: how to control and manage the variation while allowing for flexibility. Complex. ...Very complex.

This complexity means that no single approach can be right for all situations. Nevertheless, there is the need to establish continuity and congruency in the midst of this balancing act. ...Even more complex.

So what kind of miracle worker does it take to truly and effectively lead an organization to a desired state of cultural and financial strength? A miracle worker isn't needed—only a person with faith. Whatever the nature or approach to achieving some future state, the leader must have faith—faith in the plan, in the people, in the process, in the market, in the customer, and faith in whatever it takes to achieve the goal. The leader must also demonstrate a leap of faith in venturing on such a journey in the first place.

Inherent in demonstrating and acting on this faith is the presence of a required set of leadership skills and abilities. These might include:

- communicating in an open, honest, and accessible manner,
- maintaining a genuine interest in the ideas of others,
- admitting mistakes, learning from them, and allowing others to do the same,
- honestly accepting personal strengths and limitations,
- dealing with conflict in a way which supports resolution in the context of ongoing relationships,
- making decisive decisions,

- the ability to create congruency,
- a demonstrated enthusiasm for both the vision and the product.

The leader must recognize and act on the basis of shared values. Individuals cannot be expected to commit to a new vision if they are unable to find value in that vision. They do not change their behavior without knowing what new behavior is expected of them and why. They cannot make decisions unless they have information; then they will make the best decisions they can with the amount of information available to them. A common set of values enables the leader to more easily trust the people; the people to more easily follow the leader; and all to be creative and committed to the new vision.

These ideas are very complex and the ability to balance this complexity is a fundamental requirement for effective leadership.

Given our perspective on leadership and the commitment to develop the people/process components of the balancing act, let me acknowledge the financial components. I recognize that the CEO, Manager, or Team Leader is responsible for the financial outcomes expected from the group. The position of our book, however, suggests that these two aspects—people/process and financial—are not mutually exclusive. I believe that the first results in the last. Like a Tai Chi master, a leader must be firmly rooted in his or her own values and identity, able to shift gears without giving up balance, and remain able to view things in perspective.

Some of the vignettes in our book illustrate the results of balance. Some show the results of being out of balance. In each one, we've offered some ideas on why and how we get out of balance, why and how we can get into balance, and how we can stay there. These ideas are offered in support of good leadership of people and good management of systems and processes.

Dr. Deming frequently reminded us.....

A leader must understand that a system is composed of people,
not mere machinery, nor activities, nor organization charts.

Our book promotes balanced leadership of people with balanced management of systems.

This article was excerpted from Anita Simonton's book,
Confessions of a Management Consultant Turned CEO,
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