

## Leadership is like Pornography - Improving Leadership Performance!

**Preface:** This is the sixth in a series of eight articles on issues of importance to the management of organizations and the leadership of people. The first article created a Management “Jambalaya” using various ingredients - “leftover” ideas that still have application in the world of people and work. The articles that follow will use the same series of ingredients and a “fresh” approach to create an entrée – nutritious food for thought.

**Disclaimer:** This is one man’s view / opinion of Leadership. It ain’t right and it ain’t wrong; it’s just an opinion. The facts are that Leadership is all too often studied in terms of personalities, policy, and performance and all too seldom as a process. Leaders vary. Elvis, Jesus, Joan of Arc, Idi Amin, Hitler, Martin Luther King Jr. Bill Clinton, George (W. or H. W.) Bush, Napoleon, and Miss Jones the Master of her Cub Scout troop are all leaders. They are diverse as a group yet they share one common denominator – followers! This is the one absolute of leadership (Peter Drucker).

**THIS ARTICLE IS ABOUT THE PROCESS AND ROLES OF LEADERSHIP, NOT THE POLICIES, PERSONALITIES, OR PERFORMANCE OF LEADERS.**

### The Ingredient / Entrée – Improving Leadership Performance

A judge once while struggling to define pornography stated simply, “I know it when I see it!” Leaders are like that too. If I try to define one and then compare a list of recognized leaders to that definition there is almost always a conflict. The Love that was Jesus is at odds with the hate of Idi Amin. Hitler was the antithesis of Martin Luther King – Hitler was violence, MLK lived non-violence.

Dig deeper and the “ideal” of leadership becomes harder to define. Some leaders have serious personal character flaws yet provide effective policy and its implementation. Some leaders are paragons of morality and virtue and ineffective in their role of leadership. Some leader have admirable character traits and proven leadership skills; some fail both as individuals and as leaders.

Some are smart; some aren’t “the brightest crayon in the box”. Some stand tall. Some can’t stand at all. Some are handsome - some homely. Some articulate well. Others fumble with language. Some talk the talk. Others walk the walk.

Democrat, Republican, Independent, Libertarian, Communist, Black, White, Red, Yellow, or Brown, Doctor, Lawyer or Indian Chief, all can be leaders if, and only if, they have followers. We can spend the balance of this article negotiating a definition of leadership or we can agree that “we know it when we see it” and consider ways to be more effective in our leadership efforts. Rather than wasting more time with a dictionary, I choose the pornography definition. Let’s move on!

Let's look at what leaders do (the process of leadership) or should do and forget categorizing them in size, shape, colors, personalities, etc.

As stated earlier, Peter Drucker indicates that the "one absolute of Leadership is followers." Max DePree suggests that the "first role of a leader is to define reality." Henry Kissinger proposes "the task of the leaders is to get people from where they are to where they have not been."

Based upon the observations of these experts, the process is simple. It's about defining a current reality – a starting point (where we are today), establishing a future ideal (where we want to go), and mobilizing, organizing, and energizing people to follow (followers) us in the venture.

The roles defined in the process include – Dream Catcher, Security Guard, Environmental Engineer, and Coach. Other roles might include psychologist, cheerleader, counselor, traffic cop, etc. Being and improving as a leader can seem overwhelming. It's a lot like "eating an elephant." The most effective way (and probably the only way) to eat an elephant is "to cut it into bite size pieces." The roles are defined below and questions to enhance effectiveness follow.

Dream Catcher – If you don't know what this is, you've probably seen one before. Often they hang in the office or home of an aging Baby Boomer (a.k.a. – old hippie) or from their rear view mirror. It's a Native American artifact. It looks a little like a spider web with a hole in the center on a circular frame. There are probably also feathers, or shells hanging from the frame.

Although the legends vary, the premise is that a Dream Catcher captures your dreams and holds the "good ones" for your use, and lets the "bad ones" go.

A leader needs to create or capture a Vision (a future ideal) of sufficient grandeur to attract and motivate followers and (s)he must have the commitment to that Vision and the discipline to pursue it. Leaders and their Vision are about a better tomorrow. They are hope salesmen. If they promise no better than the status quo – where will they find followers?

(I know what you're thinking – Saddam Hussein didn't "sell" hope, he "peddled" fear. For the majority of the people in his country, you are right. I'd suggest his inner circle was his followers and the rest of the people were their captives. The fear and torture he created took away all hope as free people define it. Maybe to his minions, hope was just structure – status quo that merely let one live and escape torture for another day.)

**YOU WANT TO LEAD. YOU NEED FOLLOWERS. TO GAIN FOLLOWERS FIND, SELL, AND DELIVER HOPE – A BETTER TOMORROW.**

- **Is your Vision real and of value to your followers? Is it like Goldilocks – not too big, not too small but just right (be bold not ridiculous – JFK had a vision to land on the moon not the sun!). Would you “chase” this dream as a follower? Is this Vision the best expenditure of the resources available?**

**Security Guard – The leader must protect the Values, Vision, and Mission – the Organization. Attempts at change invite attacks from the Marketplace and from the status quo advocates inside of the system. Beware of sabotage.**

- **Who’s involved in the process? Who’s committed to the Vision? Is activity focused on positive productivity or to camouflage attempts from the status quo advocates to “kill” the new? Is process in your organization used as a tool to leverage your strengths and relationships or is it a weapon to destroy innovation / change? Watch for the rallying cry against your Vision, “great plan but the devil’s in the detail.” Rephrase this as “God’s (the opportunity) is in the detail.” (The details are the “facts” / reality. Manipulation of these facts determine whether the devil or God is in the detail. God is good; the devil is bad. GO WITH THE GOOD!**

**Organizational Architect – As a leader you must build an organization and processes to support your followers as you venture into the future in pursuit of your shared Vision. The foundation of the organization will be the Values established. The “ceiling” of this structure is the rainbow and the pot of gold at its end – THE VISION AND MISSION. The systems and processes and job functions are the infrastructure – the framework for tomorrow.**

- **Is the foundation (your values) big, stable, and strong enough to build on? Will it support the future? Is the “rainbow” enough of a challenge to sustain your efforts? Will your followers stand on the foundation and reach for the “rainbow”? Can you design the infrastructure needed? Will you do it?**

**Environmental Engineer – In this role you must detect and dispose of toxins in the organization and the environment in which your organization exists. To be effective you need “healthy” people and a “healthy” organization. There are poisons in your workplace. If you have a “healthy” organization and introduce in a “toxic” person, the system will be weakened. If you have a “sick” system and bring in “healthy people”, they may become infected. ROOT OUT THE POISON”.**

- **Are the Vision and Values of the organization compatible with the Organizational Culture and the individuals that are the organization? If yes continue; if no, begin abatement immediately (changing culture is extremely difficult). Are the people willing and able to pursue the Vision within the Values? If unable offer training and development. If unwilling, create environmental changes to allow individuals to motivate themselves to the Vision (you can’t motivate people – motivation is internal to each person). Is your organization living, learning, and growing or is it dead and yet to fall?**

**Coach** – This is leadership in the trenches. This is concrete not concept. This is not academics; this is application. The leader / coach must know the Vision and Values, (S)he must create a team whose Mission it is to pursue the Vision. (S)he must hold the team accountable to the Values. (S)he’s responsible for the results.

Building the team requires recruiting and positioning the right people in the right roles. The coach must develop, train, condition, discipline, etc. each player individually and all players as a group.

The coach is in equal parts preparation and execution. The coach knows the positions and what must be done in each role. (S)he understands how each role must be refined / adapted based upon the player and the opposition. The coach, however, does not get on the field (s)he works from the sideline.

The coach knows his players – their strengths and weaknesses. (S)he knows these from the context of the team, the schedule and “tonight’s” game. (S)he mixes and matches positions, timing, plays, strategies, and tactics based upon whose in the game. Coaches are master contingency planners – an injury occurs, a fumble is lost, a point is scored and a change is made.

Coaches can focus a team. (S)he knows when to test a rookie, when to overlook an error, when to complement and when to ignore. Coaches know the aging of their athletes and the nurturing of the egos. They understand that the “whole is more than the sum of the parts.” Good coaches understand their game. Great coaches understand and teach LIFE.

Coaches can address the obvious, but more importantly they can discern the difference between a good result based upon a mediocre effort and a less than desirable outcome based upon the best effort. Coaches know when to “kick butts” and when to hold a player up who wants to fall down. Coaches “ignite” fires in the souls of their players and calm their spirits when needed. There is more – so much more. Bad coaches are forgotten, good ones remembered, and great ones loved.

- Do you have the right players? Are the players in the right positions? Is the team right for the schedule (your competition)? Are the players in condition? Are they ready, willing, and able? Do you know the competition as well as you know your own team? What are your contingency plans? Are you planning for tomorrow as well as today? Are you testing “rookies” and preparing veterans for retirement? Do you celebrate victories, learn from defeat and utilize what’s learned? Is this about a game or LIFE?

Friday, I was talking with a frustrated friend named Floyd. Floyd is a salesman in a world of bureaucrats. He’s trying to bring them from their world of bureaucracy and tasks and into his entrepreneurial world of people and their needs. He’s struggling with the effort. Finally we agreed – “Business is not about the work; it’s about people.” Look at the roles above. LEADERSHIP IS ABOUT PEOPLE.

