

LEADERSHIP FOR THE NEW FUTURE

Exciting times. Leaders of all types and in all fields are being tested at the moment and, until the current pandemic is finally over, they will continue to be tested to the limit. In our business, we meet all sorts of leaders, from the very, very good to those who could be doing a lot better. Here's what we observe when we are working with the most effective leaders who get the best results even in the toughest of times. They tend to use these four sets of leadership behaviors:

1. A constructive, optimistic approach

We find our best leaders generally approach even the toughest of challenges believing there are both problems to be solved and opportunities to be seized upon. They are not starry-eyed optimists who downplay the negative side of a situation, but they do believe that most difficult situations have a silver lining somewhere. By focusing on a potential opportunity to be seized, they and their teams have first to resolve the problems in their way, so they don't avoid problems, but they do understand that problem resolution is not an end in itself, but a necessary initial step to reaching a much more positive outcome.

If we contrast this approach to some of our less successful leaders, they tend to view the solving of a problem as an end in itself. The result is they and their teams remain stuck in perpetual problem-solving mode.

So our best leaders start off with a constructive, optimistic vision of the outcome they want for them and their teams.

2. Motivating their teams

The next set of behaviors we observe in our most effective group of leaders are focused on listening to and getting the input of the people they lead. They do this by first clearly communicating their optimistic vision of where they would like the team to aim at being. In other words, they clearly communicate the "What". Then they actively ask for their teams' input into the "How". They listen actively for all ideas on how best to achieve the stated vision. They may also add their own, but only after making sure every person involved in the work to come has had a chance to contribute ideas and suggestions. This behavior greatly increases the team's buy-in to the resulting strategies and plans. Individual contributors have their own "skin in the game", so they work harder to make sure the team succeeds.

This behavior also greatly contributes to the professional growth of the individuals and the teams who report to these most effective leaders.

3. Simple, effective planning and execution

The best plans are the simplest ones. They are focused on delivering the best quality solutions possible, not perfect ones. This is a critical trait of the most effective leaders, because they don't get hung up on unattainable perfection. They are pragmatists, not perfectionists. The team's objectives are clear, their deliverables are measurable and the communication about performance is transparent and readily available to all those who need it.

This leads our best leaders to select team members who are self-starters, who like to take on a clearly understood challenge and who do not need to be closely managed day to day. Our best leaders never fall into the trap of micro-managing their people.

4. Building and maintaining team loyalty

Our best leaders are excellent at both building and especially maintaining the loyalty of all the people who work with and for them. The first three sets of behaviors already do much to build loyalties, not only to the leader herself or himself, but also between all the members of the team. These loyalties are critical when the inevitable difficulties arise and need large doses of cooperation between team members to resolve them.

Other strategies used by our most effective leaders to build loyalty are making sure they have a personal connection with each member of the team. Without prying, they make it their business to know each one as an individual, with a personal life, a family, friends and special pastimes and interests. Having built team loyalties, they make sure to maintain them by quickly noticing and rewarding over-and-above performance. If you do well, our best leaders will be quick to let you know they are pleased and to make sure the whole team knows specifically what you did and exactly how important it was to everyone concerned.

We are seeing these highly effective leaders at work at the moment. One of our clients, heading up a very traditional manufacturing operation, has his team focused on the new opportunities that are beginning to emerge from the current pandemic. He is getting his team excited about the new types of business they will be doing. This means that they are focused on a set of long-term positive outcomes and not just on solving the short- and mid-term problems they will have to deal with on the way.

If you want to know more about these key leadership behaviors and how effective your own leadership is, check out our web site (<https://www.colinnewhouse.com/homepage>) for the programs and tools we use to diagnose and optimize leadership styles and behaviors.

We wish you every success in navigating through to a very different and exciting future.