



Inspiring the Best Effort in Others The Essence of Exceptional Leadership

There is a steady stream being written and taught about leadership these days. There are tips about leadership, courses about leadership, books, retreats, and continuing education – all focused on leadership. While all of this material is useful and can certainly enhance one’s leadership knowledge, for the most part it avoids asking and answering two questions:

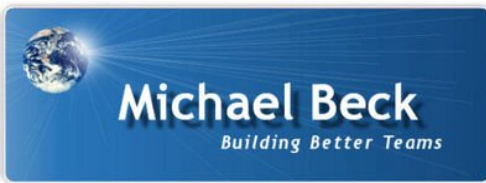
1. Why does better leadership make a difference? , and
2. How does better leadership achieve those differences?

We all know we’re “supposed” to work to be better leaders, but why does it matter, what impact does it have, and how does this all work?

Whenever I ask the “Why” question, the answers that come to the mind of most people are something like “better leadership creates more productivity, higher profits, lower turnover, greater job satisfaction, more loyalty... you get the picture. But these responses bring us to the *real* question which is, “*How* does better leadership create those things? *How* does being a better leader lead to more productivity, higher profits, lower turnover, greater job satisfaction, more loyalty?” It is the answers to these two questions which elevate us from simply learning and understanding better leadership principles to pursuing a course of action which transforms us and our leadership abilities into something that really makes a difference.

I often suggest that my clients use their own experience as their best example. Ask yourself when, during your career, you felt the most satisfied, most productive, proudest, most focused, and most committed. When we reflect back on those times, most of us would acknowledge that we didn’t feel like we did because our “leader” had made a good decision, or that they had gone through “leadership training” (That term is in quotes because leaders need to be developed, not trained.), or that their leaders were efficient, met their goals, or had success in the past. No, typically we felt the way we did (satisfied, productive, proud, focused, and committed) because of what *we* did – what *we* accomplished. It all comes back to us and how we felt. It’s generally not about anything external – it comes down to our emotions. The key to exceptional leadership, therefore, lies within our ability to relate effectively with people and their emotions.

Imagine if everyone at work felt satisfied, productive, proud, focused, and committed! What would the consequences be? The consequences would be that everyone would create greater productivity, higher profits, lower turnover, greater job satisfaction, and more loyalty! The key then, to better performance, is helping people feel more satisfied, productive, proud, focused, and committed. Notice the absence of any technical or intelligence issues? Notice that we’ve haven’t brought up the idea of “motivating” people? We haven’t touched on motivating people for one simple reason... people can’t be motivated! Trying to motivate someone is analogous to physically trying to get them to do something they don’t want to do. You won’t succeed. What really works is when we’re *self-motivated* – when we do something because we *want* to. When we’re inspired, we enjoy our work. We’re productive and proud



of our efforts. We remain focused and committed to the task at hand. In short, we put forth our best effort.

Exceptional leadership, therefore, is leadership that inspires people to give their best effort. Although, for a leader, being productive and having good time management skills are important and necessary, they are not sufficient. Having good judgment becomes increasingly important the higher in an organization we rise, however it too is insufficient for truly effective leadership. Exceptional leadership is about relating to people in such a way as to inspire them to give their best effort – for themselves, their organization, their community, their family, and/or their world.

How is this accomplished? The foundation of exceptional leadership – of inspiring others – comprises three areas - **Effective Leadership Philosophies** (for yourself and your organization), **Effective Purpose, Mission and Values**, and **Effective People Skills**.

Let's look at each of these key areas in more detail.

1. EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP PHILOSOPHIES

This topic highlights the importance of having sound philosophies on leadership, making these philosophies known, and living by them. It includes an appreciation of the fact that we always lead by example, an appreciation of the skills and abilities that set leaders apart from those they lead, and the power of adopting various Servant Leader philosophies - both for you and for those around you.

Leading by Example

Whether we acknowledge it or not, we always lead by example. In our words (what we say or don't say), in our actions (what we do or don't do), and in our expressions (what we show or don't show). If you doubt the impact of this principle, just consider this: Virtually every one of us remembers something that someone (teacher or friend) said during our high school years. I guarantee that that person doesn't realize you remember they said it! To them it was something said in passing. But nevertheless, it's something you remember. And so it is today. The things we do and say, during moments of "apparent insignificance", make an impression on those around us. People assess one another by the way they act and react, by how they conduct themselves when they aren't "on stage", by their deeds, and by how well their actions match their words. (It's been said that the true measure of character is how we act when no one else is around.) As you go through your day, try to be aware of how your actions and words appear to others. Work to ensure that your actions are a reflection of what's going on inside you. People aren't mind-readers and therefore can't guess very well at what you *meant*; they can only draw conclusions, assumptions and assessments from what you offer to them in your words and deeds.

Servant Leader Philosophies

I'd like to discuss the importance of creating an organization which attracts, supports, and inspires great people and great results. Inspiring the best effort in others is the essence of exceptional leadership. To that end, an organization must adopt a servant leader philosophy and this philosophy has two main



aspects to it. One aspect of servant leadership has to do with an understanding of the role of a leader. The other aspect has to do with the Purpose, Mission, and Values of an organization.

The Inverted Pyramid

In our leadership workshops, I'll ask participants who the most important person is to a company. The answer is (of course) the customer. The question that follows next is, "Who is the most important person in the company to that customer?" Most people get that the person most important to the customer is the one they come in contact with - the "frontline". The question that follows is the real key to a better understanding of servant leadership. This question is, "What, then, is the job of the manager of those frontline people?"

The job of the managers of the frontline folks is to make their job as easy and as effective as possible so that the customer has the best experience possible! In an effective organization, these managers make certain that their people have the proper training, skills, tools, policies, support, environment, and systems, so their work is as effective, as enjoyable and as effortless as possible.

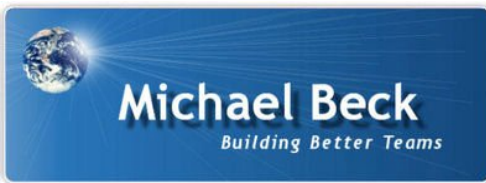
If this leadership philosophy is adopted throughout an organization, it ends up with an organizational chart that looks like an inverted pyramid. It is an organization that acknowledges the importance of the frontline and reflects the philosophy of service throughout.

Does this type of system really work or is it just a nice, kind of new-age, approach to business? It definitely works! It is a practical and extremely effective approach to conducting business. I can point to three businesses that have embraced servant leader philosophies and have not only done well, but are out-pacing their competitors by *orders of magnitude*.

The first example is a relatively small company in Denver. It's in an industry where many of its competitors are struggling just to survive. *However, this company is making a seven-figure profit!* The owner has adopted a philosophy of helping those around him succeed. He applies this philosophy to his employees, his customers and even his vendors. I've interviewed the owner and his employees, and found his team to be loyal, enthusiastic, professional, free from stress, and highly productive. The results speak for themselves.

The second example also happens to be in Denver - Frontier Airlines. In an industry plagued by stagnant growth and evaporating profits, this company has adopted a servant leader approach to business and is out-pacing its competition by leaps and bounds - both in growth and profits. By way of example, when the office closes for a holiday, many of the office staff will go into the field to help the frontline folks with the heavy holiday workload. Servant leaders permeate this organization.

The third example is Nucor Steel, which ended up dominating the U.S. steel industry by adopting a servant leader, almost egalitarian, business model. (You can read more about Nucor Steel in the book, "Good to Great" by Jim Collins.) The leadership of the company minimized the perceived differences between the frontline and the management/executive team. It became a company that recognized the important role each person plays in the success of the organization.



Adopting servant leader philosophies can make a tremendous difference on the productivity, growth and profitability of all organizations. So the bigger question is, "If embracing Servant Leader philosophies works so well, why aren't more companies adopting them?"
Good question...

2. EFFECTIVE PURPOSE, MISSION AND VALUES

The second aspect of inspiring through exceptional leadership is how organizations conduct themselves. By that I mean how they make decisions and conduct their business. An organization which inspires the best effort in its people will attract the kind of employees it wants and needs, and will retain them. It has a Purpose, a Mission, and a set of Values that it lives by, it effectively communicates them, and it measures its actions and decisions against them.

Let's first define what Purpose, Mission and Values are and then talk about the implications of having them clearly defined and embodied in the organization.

Purpose is the "**WHY**" of the equation. It defines why we do what we do. Each decision and policy should take the company closer to achieving its "WHY".

Mission is the "**WHAT**" of the equation. It defines what the company will be doing to achieve its Purpose. Staying true to the broad "WHAT" will allow the company to focus on its core activities and strengths.

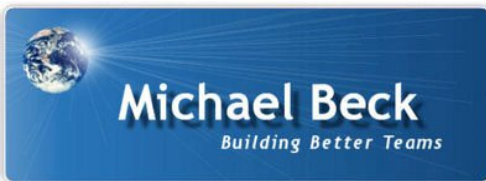
Values are the "**HOW**" of the equation. Values define how the Mission will be carried out in an effort to achieve the Purpose.

Purpose:

Purpose defines why we do what we do. It defines why we go to work each day. Without purpose, people just go through the motions and as most of us know, there's a great difference between activity and achievement. Having a purpose creates a yardstick, so to speak, to measure our decisions against. It helps us become passionate, helps us to select among the many options presented to us, helps us make better hiring decisions, and keeps us on track. It's possible to succeed without a clear purpose, but having one speeds and magnifies the results.

When a company has a clearly defined purpose it begins to act as a magnet, attracting the kind of people who will further the purpose; people who are like-minded. Not only will having a purpose attract the right people, but it will also act to retain them. This is the power behind the success of many not-for-profit organizations. Although they often are unable to pay their staff great sums of money, they continue to attract and retain people who are dedicated and who work hard to achieve the purpose of the organization. While your organization's purpose may not be as altruistic as a not-for-profit's purpose, it definitely plays an important, almost critical, role.

Earlier in this article I wrote that people cannot be motivated. They must be self-motivated. Trying to motivate someone is analogous to physically making them do something they don't want to do. It won't



work or at best simply gets them to go through the motions. The key therefore, is getting the right people on board in the first place; people who are self-motivated. What's the best way to achieve this goal? Create a clear, worthwhile purpose for your organization. Alternatively, or in addition, help each of your people develop their own purpose and then work to help each of them achieve it.

How you develop a meaningful purpose? Remember the inverted pyramid of the servant leader model? Involve people throughout the organization in order to develop and distill the essence of why your organization exists. Don't simply rely on the executive team to develop and then dictate the purpose to the group. And certainly don't rely on an outside company to create your purpose for you! It has been my experience that a well-defined statement of purpose is a single sentence, crafted to capture the essence of "why" the organization exists using as few words as possible and resonating when read or spoken. This brings clarity and energy to it, and makes it much easier to keep in mind when making decisions and policies.

Mission:

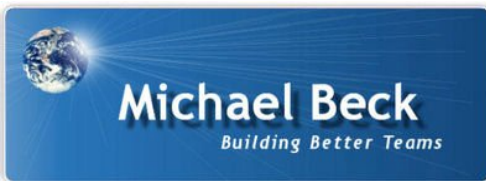
Mission defines what the company does to achieve its Purpose. The better defined a company's mission is, the easier it is to choose among the many opportunities that will present themselves. A mission – the means to achieve the Purpose - can be fairly narrow or be somewhat broad. However, one that is too narrow can unduly restrict an organization from considering opportunities that would otherwise be an excellent fit, and one that is too broad offers no guidance at all and may cause an organization to spread itself too thin, do a poor job at everything, and essentially dilute its effectiveness.

How do you determine an appropriate mission? Again, remember the inverted pyramid of the servant leader model. Involve people throughout the organization to develop and distill the essence of what your organization is about. Don't simply rely on the executive level to develop and then dictate the mission to the group. Work to strike that balance between clarity and confinement – not too broad, yet not overly restrictive.

Values:

Values define how the Mission will be carried out in an effort to achieve the Purpose. They define the "rules of the game". Some of them will come to mind quite easily, things like honesty, courtesy, kindness, and ethics. But some other important values will only surface when brainstorming takes place - when different perspectives and voices are heard. Values like authenticity and vulnerability may be placed on the table for consideration. (Which, by the way, are two essential qualities of an exceptional leader.) It doesn't matter which values are decided upon as being important to the company. What *is* important however, is that whatever they are, everyone in the company lives by them and supports them. It's important that the policies and decisions of the company are in alignment with them. If the company has an acknowledged list of values it purports to live by and then chooses to ignore them, the list becomes a sore point and acts as a negative reflection of what kind of organization you really lead.

When a company has clearly defined its Purpose, Mission, and Values, then all decisions, policies, and actions will have a measuring stick to keep them on course and you will have an organization which attracts and keeps the best!



3. EFFECTIVE PEOPLE SKILLS

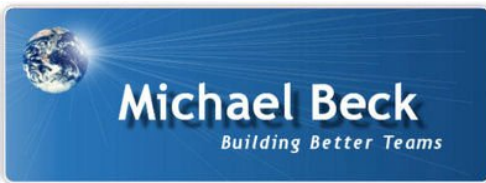
The people skills which are most effective in leadership are encompassed in the concepts set forth in the groundbreaking work done by Daniel Goleman on Emotional Intelligence. His studies have demonstrated that leaders who consistently outperform their peers not only have the technical skills and intelligence (IQ) required, but more importantly, have mastered most of the aspects of Emotional Intelligence (EQ). I've recently had some discussions with clients regarding whether employing the competencies of Emotional Intelligence in their leadership style will accelerate or decelerate their own and their team's productivity. Study after study has shown that leaders who sharpen and employ EI skills consistently outperform peers who lead through variations of the stereotypical Command-Control model. Additionally, companies which promote the use of EI skills outdistance competitors who haven't refined their corporate cultures. Despite these results, many people still feel that creating an EI culture will soften the performance and results of their company, division, and/or department.

I believe that there are common sense perspectives we can take and observations we can make in an effort to "make the case" for the use of EI in leadership and in a company's culture. As an example, when selecting someone for employment in a management or executive role, which set of traits and skills do you value most - technical skills or people skills? My response and the response of every leader I've spoken with is the same – people skills. Why is that? Isn't technical competency important? After all, isn't "getting the job done" what it's all about? The answer of course is that technical skills **are** important and productivity **is** important. It's just that they are fairly easy to come by. It's relatively easy to find a competent engineer or accountant, right? The challenge is finding someone who has those technical skills but also knows how to deal with people. One's ability to deal effectively with people is the skill which makes things happen. This brings us to my second example. In order for someone to be an exceptional leader, they must have followers. My contention is that under Command-Control leadership, people perform predominantly out of fear. They may be afraid of losing a job, not getting a raise, or being chastised by a superior. But they are basically obeying the commands of the person in charge, who in effect, controls them. The observation to be made here is that there is a great distinction between obeying and following. People who **obey**, do their work, but often only to avoid the consequences of poor performance. **Followers**, on the other hand, are inspired by a multitude of forces – both internal and external. It's no wonder that EI-focused companies tend to be more innovative, have less turnover, and are more profitable.

The final common sense case for emphasizing EI skills comes from our own experience. I'll often ask clients or workshop attendees for the traits of the best boss they ever had and the traits of the worst boss. Inevitably, I'll get answers like: (Best) respected my ideas, worked to develop me, challenged me, empowered me and let me make my own mistakes,... and (Worst) micro-managed, was overly demanding, poor communicator, mistrustful, ... What's interesting is that in no case were the technical skills or the intelligence of a boss either praised or condemned. All the notable traits, both good and bad, had to do with people skills. Without followers, you can't be a leader.

The four main areas of Emotional Intelligence people skills are:

Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Reading Other People, and Managing Relationships.



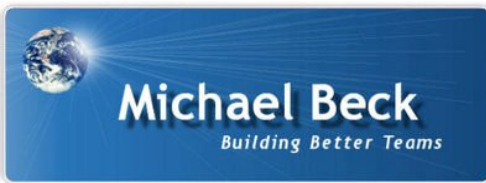
Here is a break-down of the competencies encompassed by Effective People Skills and Emotional Intelligence:

◊ Personal Competence

- **Self-Awareness**
 - **Emotional Self-Awareness** - The ability to read your own emotions and to appreciate their impact on your actions, reactions, and decisions
 - **Accurate Self-Assessment** - The ability to know your own strengths and weaknesses
 - **Positive Self-Image** - Having a reasonable sense of self-worth and abilities
- **Self-Management**
 - **Emotional Self-Control** - The ability to control emotions that are inappropriate
 - **Transparency** - Being honest and trustworthy, and having integrity
 - **Adaptability** - The ability to be flexible in changing situations
 - **Achievement** - The drive to meet inner standards of excellence
 - **Initiative** - Being ready to act and seize opportunities
 - **Optimism** - The ability to see the positive in events

◊ Social Competence

- **Reading Other People**
 - **Empathy** - The ability to sense others' emotions and to understand their perspective
 - **Organizational Awareness** - The ability to sense the politics and networks of the organization
 - **Service Orientation** - The ability to sense, understand and fulfill the needs of customers and followers
- **Managing Relationships**
 - **Developing Others** - Building others' abilities
 - **Inspirational Leadership** - Having a compelling vision to lead with
 - **Change Catalyst** - The ability to initiate, manage, and lead in a new direction
 - **Influence** - The ability to utilize persuasion
 - **Conflict Management** - The ability to resolve disagreements
 - **Teamwork and Collaboration** - The ability to build and guide teams



Competency in each of these areas will help anyone become better at working with people. **Proficiency** in certain sets of these competencies will propel a leader and an organization towards greater productivity, greater satisfaction, and increased profitability.

CONCLUSION

The foundation of exceptional leadership – of inspiring others – comprises three areas - **Effective Leadership Philosophies** (for yourself and your organization), **Effective Purpose, Mission and Values**, and **Effective People Skills**.

The essence of exceptional leadership is the ability to inspire the best effort in others. When people choose to give their best effort, satisfaction increases, pride develops, innovation is born, productivity improves, stability prevails, and profitability increases. The keys to a highly performing organization are creating an inspiring environment and personally becoming an effective leader. We can create an inspiring environment by adopting effective leadership philosophies and clarifying a Purpose, Mission and set of Values. We can personally become a more effective leader by honing and acquiring effective people skills.

Re-creating your organization in a way that reflects servant leader philosophies will launch your company to new heights of success, and will move everyone who comes in contact with you and your organization towards their own personal success.

Clarifying your organization's Purpose, Mission and Values will not only provide a yardstick for measuring decisions and policies against, but will create an environment which attracts and retains the right people.

Personally developing and enhancing your people skills by honing and developing your Emotional Intelligence competencies, and helping those around you to do the same, will establish you as a truly exceptional leader; a leader who inspires the best effort in others.