

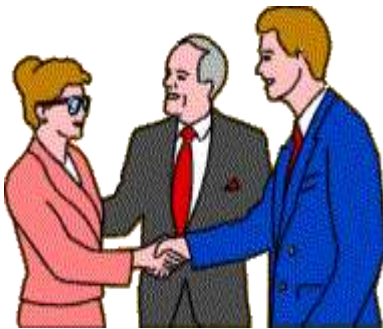


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## Leadership vs. Transformational Leadership and Change

By Daryl C. Brown



### What is a leader and why does it matter?

What is a leader? Is it a person that tells others what to do? Is it a person that does things that others cannot do? Is a leader the boss? These questions are probably some of the most asked questions ever. Does effective leadership matter? The answer is definitely yes to that question. Another question that yearns to be asked is why does effective leadership matter? There are numerous answers to this question but I will venture to say that the most common replies to this question will involve four parts. They are... (1) The shortage of effective leaders in our schools, (2) The rapidly increasing teacher shortage. (3) The ever decreasing high school graduation rate. (4) Last but not least is the era of accountability that we are faced with at this point. Let's examine each of these issues based on its effect on the profession we love.

The shortage of effective leaders has been a growing issue over the last ten to fifteen years. Currently, because of the massive teacher shortages and the lack of appreciation for education as a profession, the impact and role of human resource development and management has become even more important. In the twenty-first century, we must continue to pursue and hire our best and brightest educational prospects. At the same time, we have an obligation to improve and promote the personal and professional growth of all employees. The baby –boom population is retiring at unprecedented numbers and we do not have capable individuals that are willing and able to replace them. Minority candidates are few because most upwardly mobile African-American students have chosen professions such as law, business and medicine which

were not as easily accessible to their parents decades ago. We have not done a good job of “stocking the pond” to ensure that there will be enough educators for the future. So if we do not have enough teachers in our pools this makes the pool of viable administrators even more daunting a task to fill. Last but not least, we cannot forget about the mandates of No Child Left Behind on the federal level and The Educational Accountability Act on the local and state level. These two legislative mandates have redefined the educational arena and educational leadership in ways that were never imagined. Teachers and administrators have had to become purveyors of data in a manner that most have never thought about. Lack of knowledge pertaining to data and trends could possibly leave a school at risk of being placed on the state impairment list and/or could result in teaching and administrative reassignments. Failure to have positive leadership during these times is a recipe for disaster. For instance, a principal that inherits a school that has a notoriously high drop-out rate and subsequently low graduation rate needs to take the proper measures to begin solving this complex problem. Failure to act could result in the same behaviors manifesting themselves throughout their tenure and thus could shorten that tenure tremendously.

Effective leaders are driven by results ( Ulrich, Zenegar & Smallwood, 1999, p.28). The question is how does the effective leader get the desired results? Leaders go about getting their results in different ways or approaches. As I stated previously, results in education are measured in student achievement and learning. We are immersed in an era of increased school accountability and definitely a results–driven profession where only the strong can and will survive.

### **Leadership versus Transformational Leadership**

What makes a leader a transformational leader? The leading characteristics differentiating the two leadership styles is that a transformational leader can transform a vision into reality and motivate people to transcend their personal interests for the good of the group (Collins,2001,p.39). Transformational leaders inspire others in the organization with great energy, vision and they have an innate ability to get others to follow them. With the recent presidential campaign and subsequent election of Barack Obama on the platform of transformational leadership and change, this term has found its way on the tongues of millions of people around the world. What President Obama aspires to do with our country and world is very similar to what all transformational leaders aspire to accomplish in their respective areas. Yes it takes a person with keen leadership abilities to even have an opportunity to be in a

position to run for president; but to inspire the millions of people as President Obama has done, takes a great degree of transformational leadership ability. In order to have crowds consistently numbering in the tens of thousands during an entire twenty two month campaign is characteristic of transformational leadership. This characteristic is what separates normal leadership from transformational leadership. President Obama's platform of transformational leadership is not one that is unique to just the realm of politics. There are certain aspects that transformational leaders possess in all types of disciplines. I felt inclined to use President Obama as an example because of his historic win and the platform he won on. Ronald Reagan instilled the same types of hope and promise during his campaign and subsequent victory over Jimmy Carter in 1980. Even though I was only nine years old when President Reagan won his first term, I have surmised from talking with family members and friends that there are numerous similarities between the campaigns and leadership qualities of President Obama and President Reagan. Both men were and are strong personality types that are able to instill their vision for the country. Both men allowed you to see their dynamic personality and envision the country through their eyes. These men surrounded and are in the process of surrounding themselves with people that make them better and that they make better. The transformational educational leader is no different. The basic premise of transformational leadership revolves around concepts that are constantly advocated in the educational process. Leadership guides organizational direction and focus. Successful leaders are those who are able through various methods of connecting and motivating faculty and staff members with an essential vision and plan of action.

### **Characteristics of Transformational Leaders**

Now that we have had the opportunity to explore the difference between leadership and transformational leadership, let's explore the characteristics of transformational leaders. I have read and will cite numerous entries of Jim Collins' work "*Good to Great*" and it is appropriate that I frame this portion of the paper around this classic book. Collins states several characteristics for what he calls a level five leader, which is a term that is synonymous with transformational leader. I mentioned earlier about President Obama being able to draw crowds in the tens of thousands on the campaign trail. His charisma was the reason he could attract those types of numbers. One of the biggest and most innate characteristics that a transformational leader possesses in abundance is charisma. Charisma is not an attribute that a person can fake, you are either born with this quality or you are not. Charisma can be practiced, but those truly great leaders such as Reagan, Clinton, Obama, Lee Iacocca, long-time Chrysler

chairman and even Dave Roberts the former Wendy's chairman all exhibited this quality. They were able to walk into a meeting room, assembly line or any place they desired and immediately command the attention of those around them without having to announce their presence. These gentlemen had a way to mesmerize audiences with their speeches, yet could talk to an individual as if they were long time friends. Through this quality these gentlemen have been able to acquire something that Jim Collins (2001) refers to as "true power", which is the ability to get the most out of their surroundings and individuals in their surroundings, thus making the organization stronger.

Another characteristic of a transformational leader is the ability to change the culture of a situation. Even more important is the ability to master the culture shift without verbally announcing what you are doing. Most times the level of accountability has to rise in order for the culture of an organization to change. When accountability rises, most individuals become very uneasy. The transformational leader recognizes this and is able to mediate and facilitate the culture shift without causing unnecessary anxiety for individuals that it is not intended for. A simple yet relevant example of this is for a new administrator to come into a school that has had a notoriously bad history of discipline issues and very poor public perception. Once he/she investigates and looks at the discipline, it is apparent that the issues are coming from a lack of follow up by teachers in promptly addressing discipline problems.

The issues tend to continue to manifest themselves and get worse. Addressing this issue in the wrong manner could result in mutiny in the faculty lounge but if he/she handles the situation correctly it can change the entire culture of the school and community and go a long way to putting the school on track to successful community relations.

Collins (2001) makes a splendid point when he surmises that level five leaders know that "people are not our best assets, the right people are our best assets." A leader is only as good as the people they have around them. The worst thing a leader can do is to have himself/herself surrounded by incompetence. There is no leader that can afford to manage every aspect of a complex organization. This is why it is so important to have competent, trustworthy and most of all "hungry for perfection" people around you. As a principal, I want to be surrounded by those that want to be principals. These kinds of ambitious types have to be tempered by a yearning to learn as much as possible for the good of the organization. There is no need to surround oneself with those that want to be in charge for the title and the power. The organizational well being is of the utmost importance and has to be kept at the forefront of all thought processes. A

classic example of a person surrounding themselves with capable and trustworthy people is the selection process that President elect Obama is completing at the present time. He has strategically aligned himself with people from three different administrations, President Clinton's, President George W. Bush's and his own administration. Yet what he has been able to do is match the strengths, commitments and loyalties of these people to match the needs of the country, which is the correct course of action. If we get the right people on the bus, the right people in the right spots, and the wrong people off the bus, then we will figure out how to make it someplace great (Collins,2001,p 42). This phrase is another important part of the transformational leader's way of thinking. Collins (2001) is adamant that people, not programs, are what make organizations successful and effective.

Collins (2001) states that you have to confront the data for what it is. This is the final characteristic I would like to discuss but it easily could have been the first characteristic to be discussed. Data is readily available via the state department of education for an incoming principal to review. There is so much data it can be overwhelming. The wise thing for an incoming person to do is to peruse this data and meet with constitute groups to gain their input concerning the organization. The leader also has to make assessments of what is taking place through their own observations. Now with these numerous avenues of input, the leader can begin to triangulate data and begin to see where the changes need to come. With the facts in hand the leader now has grounds to act and act with reasonable certainty that they are moving in the right direction. Information analysis is one of the most important tools of educators. Ulrich, Zenegar & Smallwood (1999) stated the move to excellence and improvement can only be achieved after a detailed analysis of organizational strengths and weaknesses.

Collins(2001) states leaders have to model the behavior of continuous improvement in order to guide their organization's improvement efforts, resulting in performance excellence. The power of the transformational leader is their ability to focus all levels of the educational system on a continuous cycle of improvement and performance excellence.

A level five leader which constitutes a transformational leader builds enduring greatness through a blend of personal humility and professional will (Collins, 2001, p. 20). Level five leaders do not boast about being level five leaders; as a matter of fact, they do not boast at all. They are not leaders that have to say they are in charge for you to know they are in charge. It is not about power to the level five leader, it is about making the organization work. I mentioned earlier that level five leaders exhibit a personal power that can be defined as *true power*; the ability to

get all you want from the environment, given what is available. Performance results are necessary to prove that the journey and cycle of continuous improvement is producing positive results and increasing student and staff achievement. Being a transformational leader requires the establishment and promotion of several core values. The process of improvement and high performance must always be focused and driven by the individual needs of our stakeholders and community. Leadership must be active and able to promote as well as sustain continuous reform and improvement. Transformational leaders are fanatically driven, infected with an incurable need to produce results (Collins, 2001, p. 30).

Sergiovanni (1992) also advocates a moral style of leadership that can only be attained through successful management. All administrators have to endorse specific competencies that will empower their school and stakeholders. The author predicts that the successful promotion of leadership and management will lead to a climate of continuous change. When these actions are routine and united, the sparks of effective change will engulf your school.

The combination of diverse individuals with diffuse ideas is one of the most powerful agents of change. When people with vast differences unite for a common goal, any problem becomes solvable. The management of paradox empowers all stakeholders to exchange strengths as well as weaknesses.

Sergiovanni (1992) predicts that when the measures of the management of meaning are promoted, individuals connect and bond for a larger purpose. I truly believe that often students with limited opportunities are not enhanced by our educational systems. As one becomes acquainted with the vision of their organization, they realize it has to be a perfect fit in their personal educational philosophy.

Leadership and change are two of the most frustrating elements that administrators juggle on a daily basis. These concepts often form an uneasy alliance but are essential for all effective administrators. I truly believe most teachers want to achieve a high level of success. As an administrator, the choice of management will greatly determine if stakeholders follow your leadership and implement change in the daily structure of activities. Transformation is a process that can only be achieved through people and the development of relationships over time.

Transformational leadership has allowed many to achieve a level of professional success. One of the hardest tasks for some administrators is to acknowledge differences in philosophies and

ideas. Being able to listen and implement different viewpoints builds a huge level of trust from any faculty. Programs and curriculum do not automatically invoke change. When skilled professionals are allowed to implement and personalize these instruments, we empower our schools to enhance learning and the local community

### **Transformational leadership in the Classroom**

Nell Noddings' book, "*A Challenge to Care*" really highlights many aspects that transformational leaders have to entail in order to enact change in their organization. Although this book is written from an entirely different perspective than the books of Sergiovanni (1992) and Collins (2001), the suggestions that Nell Noddings (2005) gives can all be incorporated into our lives and jobs. We need to care about students in order to have them care for their education. Relationships are a cornerstone for any successful transformational leader. In order to exact change over an organization, it is of paramount importance that we spend time getting to know our organization's wants, needs, and desires. Then and only then can we begin the process of change. We owe it to the generation that understands how to download music from a computer to a hand-held MP-3 player; yet the same student does not know who Bill Gates is. There is something about that scenario that is wrong. This same student has the intellectual capability to be a straight A student but odds are that they are failing.

I was recently visited a classroom and five students were reviewing for an end-of-course test. There was a young man that was really astute at answering questions during this review. It appeared that he had a great grasp of the content. Upon further investigation, I found out the he was failing the class for the first three nine weeks. It was apparent that he knew the material but did not care enough to put the effort into passing this class. I truly believe that in a caring environment the teachers, parents, or someone should have been able to avoid this young man failing this class. It is true that this young man knew the material, but how do we get others like him to put what they know on paper? The answer is we have to care. There should have been a lot of dialogue with this young man and his parents to assist in his development. The odds are this young man will repeat the ninth grade and become a higher risk to become a drop-out. This all could have been avoided if someone had cared enough to say something. Transformational leaders have to be adept at picking up on these situations and being able to enact their organization to make change apparent for these young people.

The globalization of our world demands that we establish effective partnerships that coincide with local, corporate aspirations and promotions and outline mainstream values and modes of citizenship. The only way we can ensure that these types of partnerships are established is through transformational leadership. Administrators must continuously refine and promote effective strategies that enhance change.

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