

More Change Demands More Leadership

By Jim Clemmer



"Leadership is about coping with change. Part of the reason it has become so important in recent years is that the world has become more competitive and more volatile...doing what was done yesterday, or doing it 5% better, is no longer a formula for success. Major changes are more and more necessary to survive and compete effectively in this new environment. More change always demands more leadership." — John Kotter, "What Leaders Really Do," Harvard Business Review

Change is a fact of life. And as the pace of change accelerates, organizations are being pulled in many directions by factors such as new technologies, customer demands, e-commerce, workforce demographics, business model challenges, fierce competition, shareholder expectations, shrinking cycle times, and shifting work ethics. Now, more than ever, organizations need the bonding glue of a strong culture to hold everything and everyone together.

At the core of a high performance culture is a strong leader who knows where he or she wants to lead their organization, but is highly flexible and opportunistic in pulling teams together to try new approaches, to experiment, and to learn (as well as occasionally fail) their way to success. As Winston Churchill put it, "True genius resides in the capacity for evaluation of uncertain, hazardous, and conflicting information."

And no matter what the information is, leaders always inspire a response, whether positive or negative. They move forward with purposeful action that, like a powerful magnet, both attracts and repels. Those people who are excited by the vision, join the team and add to a powerful coalition. Those who are lukewarm or turned off by the vision, values, and purpose quickly turn away. Few are left indifferent and apathetic.

Within the workplace, a leader typically has a clear mental picture of what success looks like for a particular project or, more generally, for a successful team or the organization as a whole. He or she is able to "emotionalize" that picture and bring it alive for people. Leaders impart a sense of trust and credibility by living true to a set of core values or guiding principles – even if they haven't articulated and labeled them. People respond to this leadership because they can clearly see the principles from which it flows. Dorothy Law Nolte's poem, "Children Learn What They Live" was the inspiration for my own poem about team member learning.

Team Members Learn What They Live

If a team member lives with fear,
He learns to avoid risk-taking.

If a team member lives with power,
She learns to resist change.

If a team member lives with mistrust,
He learns to be suspicious.

If a team member lives with control,
She learns how to beat the rules.

If a team member lives with small expectations,
He learns to have a limited horizon.

If a team member lives strictly within reality,
She learns to focus only on what is.

If a team member lives with leadership,
He learns how to take initiative.

If a team member lives with inspiring visions,
She learns how to climb out of reality ruts.

If a team member lives with core values,
He learns how to set priorities.

If a team member lives with a meaningful purpose,
She learns how to tap into a deeper energy.

If a team member lives with growth and learning,
He learns how to manage change.

If a team member lives with participation,
She learns how to be a valued partner.

If a team member lives with emotional intelligence,
He learns how to be a leader.

About the author:

Jim Clemmer's practical leadership & personal growth books, workshops, and team retreats have helped hundreds of thousands of people worldwide improve personal, team, and organizational performance. Jim's web site, JimClemmer.com, has over 300 articles and dozens of video clips covering a broad range of topics on change, organization improvement, self-leadership, and leading others.

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