Running Head: Essential Attributes of a Leader

The Most Essential Attributes of a Leader

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**The Most Essential Attributes of a Leader**

 Building a shared vision necessitates the essential leadership attributes of demonstrating respect, communication, patience for vision accomplishment, and a sense of timing and knowledge gathering. If leaders want to accomplish goals they need the support of the system in which they exist. In order to get everyone to work toward the goal a leader must communicate the importance of that goal. Clear up any misconceptions and gain the trust of those in the system. In addition, the leader has to have ‘some’ job specific skills and be able to access information needed to accomplish the vision. Finally, the leader has to be patient with the different mental models in the organization.

Successful leaders demonstrate respect by ensuring that the people who look to them for leadership believe their work is valued. A leader who respects those they lead demonstrates it by not micro-managing but by sharing the vision (expected outcome). According to Wheatley, a leader who understands the basic human dynamics of “our need to trust one another, our need for meaningful work, our desire to contribute and be thanked for that contribution, our need to participate in changes that affect us” (p 164) is a leader who understands how to organize people in order to accomplish goal.

 Communication is a global theme in all the readings in the leadership course. Wheatley’s organizational intelligence speaks to the importance of sharing information as directly related to the success of evolving/changing. Information is a resource that needs to be shared in order for all involved to be active participants in changing an organization. Indeed, Communication is one of the pivotal attributes of an effective leader. If communication is important to leading, then an ingredient for effective followers is information. Informed followers make intelligent decisions. Agents of change are informed people. Informed people believe in the ‘cause’ and are active participants who share the evidence that leads to positive outcomes. Leaders can achieve the goal (strategic plan) by allowing information to become a resource.

Information transforms thinking, ‘new’ information can “disturb the system into wise solutions.” (Wheatley, p.100) If leaders want active agents of change inside their organizations, they must share information and treat it as a resource. Employees/Staff/Teachers should be constantly encouraged to pursue knowledge for knowledge’s sake. When the expectation is that ‘everyone knows what we know’, leaders and followers do “good work.” When an organization operates in this way, then the leader has successfully articulated the importance of evolving rather than changing (Maybe we must stop speaking about change and talk in terms of evolving. People tend to equate change with choice, while evolving is thought as inevitable.)

Finally, Leaders must be patient. Leading means training and educating everyone who follows them. Leaders need to patiently gather information and frame it so that everyone in the organization can follow it. Leaders lead change by example. If a leader does nothing else, a leader creates an environment conducive to change. A good leader envisions an outcome and then slowly implements one phase after another until employees/staff/teachers in the organization have been led through a constant evolution of change through a systematic input of change (the boiling frog). Thus, before anyone realizes, the company has been transformed (maybe even before the 5-year plan deadline).

Patient leaders understand that leading means ensuring the environment encourages “mastery goals” over “performance-goals.” This is not to say that performance is undervalued, in a business this would lead to bankruptcy, but if everyone is working with a “mastery-goal” in mind then everyone is working toward ‘perfection.’ (Striving toward) Perfection in any endeavor leads to successful performance. Levels of performance success, of course, are determined by the level of ability of the individual; but if everyone in an organization is working to their ability, then the organization is working!

**Where am I at this point in the program?**

I think it would be foolish of me to believe that I am anywhere but on a continuum of leadership. As I reflected for this paper, I discovered that I have a bit of work before announcing that I possess the essential leadership attributes of demonstrating respect, communication, patience for vision accomplishment, and a sense of timing and knowledge gathering.

 I’m not sure that I always demonstrate respect. I don’t suffer fools lightly and tend to be very sarcastic. It will take self-monitoring to improve this in myself. I must be ever vigilant to ensure that my tone of voice is respectful and that my mannerisms are friendly and invite others to participate in discussions.

 Patience is probably my biggest flaw. I want to move quickly to accomplished things fast. This often leads to missing details that others may see as defects in the plan. In order to improve this, I must slow down and build the steps within phases that need to be in place before I go off ‘half cocked’ into a plan. I believe I’ve started developing the ability to plan through PhD courses like “Problems and Methods in Educational Research” and “Cultural Processes in Learning, Instruction, and Motivation.” These courses have obligated me to build proposals and to explain step-by-step the process of a task. While I have practiced this type of process building in the past, the standards were not as rigid as those required when creating research proposals. Through this process, I have begun to understand that any directions I give must be precise so that others can replicate my work. This is what leaders must do too. They must be able to articulate vision using precise language so that anyone can replicate/complete the work with or without the orchestrator. Which leads to the most important of the leadership attributes…communication.

 I’m guilty of holding information close. At times I don’t share in order to stay in control, other times it’s a lapse in judgment. Regardless, through the readings I have come to the realization that communication is the key to success. There are a number of situations that can be avoided if communication is free flowing. For instance, if I share all I know about a project there is a better chance that any missed information during the gathering phase will be identified by another who knows all there is to know about the project. Access to information keeps everyone in the organization on a level playing field. There are no favorites, no misconstrued loyalties, or hurt feelings because the task was given to someone else. When everyone knows all there is to know, everyone understands their part in the system and the system functions as one.

 In order to move along the leadership continuum I will need to practice the skills of communication, research, patience and building a vision. The PhD program will explicitly teach me the skills for all of the attributes but one…patience. Patience I will gain through practice, practice, practice (as Dr. Mastropieri likes to say). I am a better information ‘finder’ and ‘synthesizer’ today than I was in August when I started the program. And, I expect to be phenomenal by the end of my program. Communication (information sharing) is something of a requisite in research work and I hope to infuse this prerequisite into my professional and personal life. I really do believe that if everyone is on the same page with all the information available, things run more smoothly! Finally, respect…Although, I believe I conduct myself in a professional manner at work, I do tend to lose patience with people and allow my voice and/or mannerism to show that I don’t agree or find ideas insupportable. I need to do a better job at listening. Listening patiently to others’ opinions is something that I have struggled with all my life. This is a skill I will be working on for a long time, as it is a skill that lapses in-and-out of my awareness. Listening, I believe will help me be more patient and understanding of other opinions, mental models (‘Buy-in’).

Silvia, now that I am at the end of this essay, I see someone who is coming to terms with her Machiavellian tendencies. These are fine, but as most of the literature we read in the course suggests, it is a short-term solution to organizational growth. As you work with others in the program and at school, keep an eye on how people react, and then decide what the next best action to take is to get things done. A