



The Zen of Leadership

Rhea Blanken, Results Technology, Inc.

During a recent association conference, a “leadership development” conversation was begun using concepts from the Tao Te Ching, considered by many to be the world’s oldest leadership manual. Personal and professional leadership development of the whole human being was discussed—creating inner and outer harmony through this development was recommended.

The investigation of these ideas and their philosophy is rich with possibility. Everyone who participates by trying to understand the human spirit and what has us interested in developing will benefit. Any and all exploration is worthwhile.

Before creating leadership development programs, the investigation of “how” an organization defines *leadership* is key. Using five to seven adjectives, how does yours describe *leadership*? How does it regard its leaders, from the top down, and any volunteers?

Continue to inquire: What is the *leadership culture* of your organization that would ever give birth to a successful leadership development program? What are your organization’s responses and attitudes to risk-taking, new ideas, and inclusion, experimentation?

Engaging in these questions, the session’s participants developed a list of criteria to help associations focus on their attitudes towards leadership and its development as an ongoing program throughout their organizations. There was nothing casual reflected by the session participants’ experiences. It’s very intentional.

Consider:

- Is *leadership development* a core value of the entire organization;
- Does it have a line item dedicated to it in your operating budget? What resources are devoted to producing a leadership development program?
- Does a staff person have responsibility for it – is “leadership” in someone’s staff title and are there goals to measure its success?
- How wide an audience is affected by your leadership development programs: Boards, chapter leadership, committees and chairs, grass roots level for advocacy – how deep does it go?
- What’s the program’s challenge? Is it to go beyond the national leadership and organization’s agenda? To be more than just information, standing for something bigger than any single person can create? Does yours?
- What is the program’s focus: having leaders development within the organization *for* the organization? What about developing leaders to go out into the greater community and into the profession?
- Is there a commitment over time with opportunities for practice? It has a pre, during and post opportunities. It has sharing of knowledge, occasions for practice and growth, plus follow-up and follow-through to give it longevity. Development takes time. Is there a program-wide promise to “pass-it-on” to others?





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- Can the national organization give up “command and control” as the component parts get excited over their contribution to the program’s content, take ownership and continue to grow their leadership program?

Additionally - Does your organization believe and behave as if:

- Every member is a leader. They are, you know, and want to be interacted with that way.
- Leaders attract leaders. They do...look with whom they network.
- Structure changes behavior. People act differently depending upon whom they are interacting with and the environments that surround them.
- Shared purpose, mutual respect, a vision of the future brings leaders together. People want to belong to something.
- Collaborating with members from the next (younger) generation is key for future leader development. Remember: they are impatient and want to participate now, not later.
- Developing three-dimensional leaders is your organization’s business. All aspects of the members’ lives are affected (within the association, their companies and careers, their communities, their families). Leaders learn and develop in all these are simultaneously.
- Leadership development is ongoing...for life. Members will make the time for you and stay loyal to their association when they identify these ongoing multi-dimensional opportunities with it. Leadership development wants to be attached to a larger purpose by delivering economic, social, educational, spiritual, and ethical connections.

Or to put in the simply words of Rumi...

"Go to the people,
Learn from them,
Start with what they know,
Build on what they have.
But of the best leaders,
When their task is accomplished,
Their work is done,
The people will remark:
We have done it ourselves."

For more information, contact Rhea at: rheaz@resultstech.com.

Blanken is creator and facilitator of "Cooking Up Leadership" and author of "Facing the Future & Embracing the Future," environmental scans for the American Society of Assn Executives

