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Adding Leadership Value to an Organization

by AJ Powell 0 Comments 11 min read



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The practical application of Leadership has little to no value to an organization unless it can be evaluated as *effective*. If you're not bringing, adding, or creating value within the organization as a leader, you're essentially a waste of time, money, and resources for that organization. **No sugar-coating or beating around the bush required**, that's just the simple reality of business.

Leadership isn't easy, not for anyone, but some people find themselves consistently questioning if their actions as a leader are effective at creating value within their organizations. This is because attempting to judge or quantify leadership in action often leaves us with ambiguous bits of information until well after the fact. So it's not uncommon for some leaders to second guess their leadership decisions, direction, goals, or values. Just remember, this is normal human behavior, and leadership is a process, not an exact science.

So in an effort to help provide some guidance and mentorship to those who second guess whether or not they add value to their organization, here's a few simple key ideas that can help make your leadership effective.

As you read, take a minute to carefully evaluate each one as they may or may not apply to your current and past leadership efforts. Be completely 100% honest with yourself as well when you do... You might be surprised! You might find new room for improvement, or you might find your on an effective leadership path already.

Note: Now, before you read this list, please remember that in no way am I saying this list will make your leadership effective. Notice above I said it can help make your leadership effective. We're not in the business of giving you false absolutes here, instead, the goal is for you to critically evaluate each idea to see if it can apply to your own leadership and how.

Ready? Here we go...

Customize Your Leadership

The same approach will not work for every situation, and further, using a generic script doesn't allow you to see important differences between situations either. Smart leaders never deal in absolutes, so they know that the only dependable thing you can count on as fact is change. What works one day, may not work the next, and never expect one tactic to be universal for all situations. Instead, intelligent leaders are masters of planning for the best, but expecting the worst. Simply put, they're experts in reaction and adaption to uncertainty. Leadership isn't an exact science; instead, it's a dynamic and fluid process. As such, to be effective, it is far easier to adapt yourself to a situation, than to demand the world around you to change or conform to your style or plans – which won't happen.

Develop a Servants Heart

Leadership is not management. Unlike management, leaders are more than mere facilitators of actions; they're teachers, coaches, mentors, and guides. This means that in order to be effective as a leader, you must learn to serve your team above all else. Learn to place your teams needs and the mission needs before your own. Only then will you be in the best position possible to provide purpose, direction, and motivation. Serve the team, serve the organization, and put the needs of others before your own, and you will make yourself more effective at leadership as a result.

Build Mutuality of Concern

Focus on shifting ownership from the individual to the team. Research proves that people who internalize being a member of a team are far more productive, while those who see themselves as simply individual members of a team can actually be highly destructive to team success. Successful teams depend on each other, but more than that, they are highly internally self-motivated to striving for the collective effort, towards reaching and attaining team success. Individuals whose motivations are fed primarily by external recognition (things like “look at me” trophies, awards, benefits, and/or special perks) are not good team players as they seek their own individual goals, not the teams goals. In other words, they have little to no mutuality of concern. To be effective as a leader, be inclusive, drive team identity and ownership, and give credit where it's do, but also watch out for individual behaviors that could cause harm – hidden agendas in particular.

Be Explicit in Communication

Don't throw out generalizations and then expect people to know what you mean or what your intentions and expectations are. They will fail to meet them the majority of the time. Instead, focus on being specific. **If people clearly understand what it is you want or need**, they are better able to meet those expectations. This one's very simple to understand... As a leader, you're more effective if people understand explicitly what is expected of them, so don't be vague and never be afraid to tell them.

Look For the Goal, But Pay Attention to Your Footsteps

Setting long-term goals is fine, but how do we get there, and what do we need in order to get there? Research proves that teams who have more information are able to more clearly define goals and then reach those goals down the road than those teams who are required to work with less information. **As a leader, your job may be to set goals**, but you're more effective if you set your team up for success, if you give them the tools they need to succeed. Yes, as a leader, it's responsible behavior to strive to give your team as much information as you can, but also remember that too much information at once can quickly lead to forgetting how to reach the end result. Effective leaders instead strike a balance. Work to clearly define smaller goals that lead up to the larger ones, while questioning them to discover problems or alternative possibilities along the way.

Compare Judgements to Help Remove Biases

Research proves that human beings often make poor decisions even when given all the time in the world to make good decisions. This is because the human brain often uses cognitive biased mental shortcuts called heuristics – and this is one of the primary reasons why many intelligent people make bad decisions. Additionally, the human mind is very easily swayed by biases, and in the realm of decision-making, **we often make bad decisions under the cognitive effects of framing biases** when we fail to distinguish between two similar situations presented merely from different perspectives. Both framing biases and heuristics easily lead many down the path of **developing bad decision-making habits**, but there is a way to negotiate them. Seek out the carefully considered thoughts of others, don't jump to make quick decisions, and consider alternatives to any hasty decisions you reach. As a leader, you're more effective if you try to avoid making heuristic snap-decisions whenever possible.

Simplify, Simplify, Simplify

End of story, bureaucracy will kill your productivity and effectiveness as a leader. More technology isn't always the answer, more communication isn't always the answer, more meetings isn't always the answer, more decision-makers involved in the chain isn't always the answer, **more emails, IM's, instructions, publications, directives, or even policies, isn't always the answer**. These things simply eat up your time and resources, and as a consequence, kill your effectiveness while placing excessive amounts of needless burden on your organization. Instead, focus on holding accountability, streamlining your efforts, and being precise in your communication. The proper use of technology and communicating effectively will save you time, the right types of meetings can save you from an excessive number of bad ones, and holding others accountable for their responsibilities and behaviors creates standards. All of which will make your organization more productive, and you more effective.

Don't Bite Off More Than You Can Chew

There are lots of good ideas out there, but not all *good ideas* deserve attention. In essence, the Good Idea Fairy visits everyone at one point, and is often responsible for many projects started, many needless meetings held, many useless debates preventing action, many worthless improvements to already useful and effective things, and lots of time and money wasted. An organization bogged down by useless ideas is more than likely to achieve none of them. **This is due to limitations of perspective**, attention and change blindness, and time and money. Of course, always encourage new ideas, but to be effective as a leader, learn when to say no. Demand that only ideas which have been properly developed to a certain pre-determined point are

allowed to be presented, and focus more on accomplishing a few purposeful ideas that are essential to the organizations success, than the many that are not.

Actively Seek Feedback

How do you know if you're being productive? If your time is being used in the most valuable way possible? If your actions are producing positive results? We require feedback from the world around us in order to understand our environment, causes and effects, and even change. To be effective as a leader, this means you need to be *in the know*, and not just on the actions of those you lead or the operations you're responsible for, but on the effectiveness of your own actions as well. You can accomplish this if you foster a positive feedback environment within your organization. **Dynamic and effective teams are those who feel comfortable in offering feedback.** If your team atmosphere is one that encourages open and honest opinions, your team members will be more comfortable and willing to offer them to you, which better enables you to understand your effectiveness. Keep that Open Door policy, not just for people problems, but for both data and information gathering too.

Be Disciplined to a Purpose for the Sake of Your Time

We spend a lot of time doing everything but achieving our purpose. In meetings, planning, developing, collaborating, and more, much of our organizational activities are squandered on enabling too many opinions, too much continued planning, and even too much focus on revision. If thought about carefully, many leaders will find they squander entirely too much time focusing on the how-to's instead of the do's. **Understanding our purpose is essential**, but so is understanding how executing that purpose affects your effectiveness. Time is our most precious and valuable resource, and much of the time we forget its importance in the chaos of our daily lives. To be effective as a leader, be disciplined about your purpose, so your time, and the time of your organization, isn't wasted. Sure, *Early is On Time and On Time is Late*, is a good start, but it means nothing if asking too much leaves not enough time to meet that standard, or ends up keeping you working to meet the standard after normal hours on a regular basis. Instead, focus on guiding your organizational efforts on accomplishing the right things, instead of everything.

SOUND OFF!

What are **YOUR** thoughts?

What are your thoughts on these ideas? This is by no means an exhaustive list of effective leadership concepts, but it is a good start.

Ask yourself honestly:

- Did you find any ideas amongst this list that you already use in your daily life?
- Did you find any that you know could help you improve your leadership?
- Can you think of one or two other ideas that could be added to this list? If so, can you offer explanations with them?

Take a moment to collect your intelligent, reasoned thoughts, then let us know what you think in the **comments below!**

Open discussion helps everyone learn and grow.

Featured Image:

U.S. Marine Corps members assigned to Lima Company, 3rd Battalion, 2nd Marines, 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit wait for further instruction from their squad leader after arriving at Camp Al-Galail, Qatar, for Exercise Eagle Resolve 2013, April 21. Lima Company Marines were transported from the USS San Antonio (LPD 17) to Camp Al-Galail on a Marine CH-53 Super Stallion helicopter. Eagle Resolve is an annual, multi-national naval, land and air exercise designed to enhance regional cooperative defense efforts of the Gulf Cooperation Council and U.S. Central Command. Lima Company worked with Qatari military forces to share combat capabilities and continue to strengthen relationships with the exercises host nation. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Kenny Holston/Released)

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About the author



AJ Powell

AJ is a retired U.S. Army NCO who served in both the U.S. Navy and U.S. Army. He is a combat veteran, and has participated in contingency operations around the world. AJ is the Owner of Veteran Leadership Solutions, the Founder and Editor in Chief of The Warfighter Journal, and is a published Sociological Analyst, Researcher, Guest Lecturer, and Public Speaker. He is a graduate of Pennsylvania State University with a focus on Sociology and a science degree in Organizational Leadership, and is published in the field of sociology. AJ is an inductive analyst; public figure; researcher/writer; aviator; a certified advanced operational diver; professional instructor, trainer, mentor, and adviser; snowboarder; motorcycle rider; world traveler; he enjoys long distance endurance events, and much more.