

Leaders: born or made

[Business](#), [Leadership](#)



There has always been a difference of opinion on whether leaders are made or born. At numerous times people have been heard to exclaim about someone that he or she is a person that is born to lead. People have a tendency to believe that good and effective leaders are people who are naturally bestowed with excellent communication skills, persuasive ability, and a knack to integrate them in any team structure. Further, there are also firm opinions that it is not possible for every one to naturally acquire the skills of seamlessly inspiring a group of people, set sufficient challenges, and make every one of the group to accept those challenges and strive together to achieve them.

However, years of academic research among leaders from social, business and corporate world and political domain have brought out results that stand contrary to popular perception of leaders and their 'innate qualities and abilities' of leading people and show that effective leadership is an art that can be very much learned and practiced to perfection by anyone who devotes sufficient time and attention to it. This paper takes the point of view that leadership is a quality that can be learned by anyone with ordinary levels of intelligence and smartness and looks into the range of skills, requirements and capabilities needed by a person to develop leadership qualities.

Leadership: Definition

Leadership is the attribute of inspiring people to channel their efforts towards achieving common goals and objectives (Rosenbach and Taylor, 1998, 1). Leadership is the recognition that attainment of the group objectives and goals can be accomplished through empowering individuals

and encouraging them to overcome their rank and position in order to associate themselves and their colleagues with specific works, duties and responsibilities by setting directions, building commitment and taking challenges (Day and Halpin, 2004, 3). An important attribute of a leader is his ability to command implicit faith, confidence, and respect of his followers, irrespective of his position and power in the organization.. A leader motivates the employees by setting personal examples, and takes decisions that are quite unconventional, innovative and on the spot to resolve a deadlock. However, the most important quality of a leader is that he/she encourages leadership qualities their followers and help to create a multi-tier leader structure within the organization/group.

As the corporate world becomes increasingly competitive and diversified, organizational focus has shifted on developing leadership talents among the employees to maintain their competitive edge. Transnational companies, with their multi-level reporting structure, multiple communication networks, numerous levels of responsibilities and faced with significant differences in time, language and organizational culture are faced with the responsibility of leadership development among their employees to meet customers' demands within the limited time and resources (Collins, 2001).

Organizations are managed by several forms of leadership based on the exertion of authority within the organization. Two main, but interconnected types of leadership in organizations are the transformational leadership and the transactional leadership, both having strong philosophical and ethical foundations. Transformational leadership gives followers the opportunity to assess the leader's view, to seek explanations and provide solutions, while

transactional leadership is more based on imposition, where followers are driven by the praise, promise or reward of the leader. In the transactional leadership, the followers are confronted by reproof, threats and disciplinary actions.

Transformational leadership has become more popular in the last three decades primarily due to the changing global economy. Transformational leadership promotes equality, justice and human rights through loyalty and fairness. Recent findings suggest that team performance and communication are improved under transformational leadership. Authentic transformational leaders are sometimes transactional too. The leader may present his opinion, plans and exhort agreement on them, which however may be in the mutual interest of all involved. I consider myself as a typical transformational leader open to criticism and discussion, unafraid of my decisions being questioned. After all only collective thinking and cooperation can bring results.

Today the business world realizes that leadership is neither hierarchal nor stratified nor leadership is management. Instead leadership is about inspiring people to pool themselves together towards achieving common goals and objectives (Rosenbach and Taylor, 1998, 1). Leadership is about building commitment and taking challenges by timely distribution of specific works, duties and responsibilities and through setting directions (Day and Halpin, 2004, 3). Its not surprising then that companies are ready to invest hugely in leadership development program, as a guaranteed way to emerge ahead than their competitors.

Developing Leadership Qualities

There are abundant examples from almost every quarter of business and public domains to show that with well help designed training programs and experience even otherwise ordinary individuals can emerge as successful leaders in their own spheres. Leadership development process works on two levels. It is suggested coaching and mentoring involves practical and goal focused methods of individual and group learning and behavioral change. For obtaining most effective results and developing specific leadership skills coaching allows individuals to collaborate in methodologically assessing, understanding and solving the issue before them. It leads them to challenge the existing solution models and explore further possibilities through joint effort and accountability. Mentoring is an essential part of educational program, involves commitment and long term relationship between a senior employee and a junior employee where the latter helps in professional and personal development of the former.

The second level of leadership development is action learning that requires participants to tackle real life and real time organizational problems (ibid). Through a careful selection of objectives and problems, participants are trained on delivering organizational results, communication learning and management and develop general leadership qualities. It benefits participants greatly as it provides them crucial exposure and considerable experience within a short time. Along with these, modern organizations have also adopted the technique of job rotation, so that individuals have widest possible exposure and experience of company's functional and organizational processes.

It is vital to remember that the focus should not be on teaching leadership, instead getting participants to learn leadership. Every person has a potential to emerge in a leader by gaining knowledge, purpose and experience and apply themselves more effectively in their personal and professional domains Leadership is not a characteristic that can unfold in isolation. By its definition, it implies establishing coordination, cooperation, collaboration and orientation among the followers to achieve the designated objectives and goals. However, it is only possible when leaders can inspire their followers with respect, admiration, discipline, sense of emulation and confidence in the abilities of the leader while being helped to envision themselves as empowered individuals (Brown and Lord, 2004, 2).

Within every social, institutional or organizational structure, a leader is always looked upon the person with abilities to broach reconciliation and resolution in situation of conflict. A good leader exercises his control over most complex, demanding and otherwise impossible condition by exhibiting personal integrity, ethical and moral traits and values that other can relate to and get inspired to include them in their personal conduct (Laurie, 2000, 53). Another very crucial characteristics of leadership is that it produces new leaders from among the followers and hence, through a multiplier effect, results in empowerment of individuals and communities.

Leadership helps the followers to discover and grow their internal abilities and encourage them to become an integral part of the process, not a mere tool. This causes a reinstating of self pride and confidence among followers and it earns leaders willing obedience of people who realize the integrity of the leader in creating a just, legitimate and encouraging environment where

they see themselves as valued members and in turn lend their unconditional support to the joint cause under the leadership (Messick, 2005, 81)

Arguably, there are no definite copybook rules to construct a leader. The difficulties, complexities, and challenges associated with a situation give impetus to leadership qualities in otherwise ordinary people who believe in themselves that they are capable of rising up to the difficulties as well as helping others out of it. Therefore although it might be difficult to ‘teach’ a person quality of good leader, yet one can expect to inculcate leadership qualities by observing styles and principles of successful leaders. It is said that a leader is a dealer in hope. Leadership is then about inspiration, motivation, encouragement and direction that pulls people to accomplishments that they would not had managed if left alone. However, effective leadership is a very challenging domain as it requires some impeccable personal and organizational traits that can be developed and realized through considerable experience, knowledge and self-discipline.

Motivation has a large role to play in developing leadership. According to Isaac, Pitt and Zerbe (2001) individuals aspiring for leadership are greatly assisted a motivational model, called as expectancy theory, that suggests that self interest prompts individuals to charter a course where they tend to maximize the chances of success and growth. Thus self interest acts as a motivation that spurs people to take upon leadership roles and aspire to meet needs of followers along with requirements of the organization (ibid). Also, when leaders meet with followers, it generally results in entire work atmosphere getting highly motivated and people are spirited with aspiration to transcend their present roles and step in the role of leaders (ibid).

Leadership is influenced by both extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation. In the former, motivational behavior is seen as product of external rewards and remunerations while the latter treat motivational behavior as result of internal drives such as enjoyment of work and inner sense of competence (Isaac, Pitt and Zerbe). In either case, individuals are motivated to assume leadership to maximize their self-interest.

Leadership: Personal Attributes

A good leader should be honest, loyal and committed to the goals of the organization he intends to lead. A good leader should not have a desire for wrongful gains or hidden agendas. This is why perhaps people emphasize on transparency in all dealings of any organization. Some leaders have a self plan and pursue them rather than acting in the interests of the organization. Committed to the cause of the organization or group and being live to the sacrifices and pains of your colleagues is a basic quality of a good leader. National leaders and particularly the freedom fighters of several nations had steadfast qualities and determination in them, which helped them carry on and ultimately succeed. A good leader is perhaps a good follower.

There is never a stage in which one can have mastered everything and this applies even to leadership. Each day brings learning and experience of various types. A good leader is one who applies these learning and experience by identifying the most appropriate situation of their application. perhaps the rights and wrongs of your own acts too. . A leader is accountable for his actions and should voluntarily open up to any questions or suspicions in his dealings. Similarly a good leader should also emphasize such qualities among his followers and make them accountable too. Simplicity is a mark of

identity for any leader and projecting himself as a role model. A leader's thoughts, actions and words should be a reflection of him, inspiring all who follow. A leader indeed should have uncommon qualities to successfully lead his organization.

Conclusion

Leadership is a quality that comes through effective utilization of experience, education, self-evaluation eagerness to learn and grow. None of these qualities require a transcendental genius or divine abilities to master. They are human attributes that are present among every one of us and given time, training and motivation to master them. The truth about leadership is that any person who has wholly ingrained the necessary leadership qualities as an integral part of their character would appear as one who is born with them.

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