

## More Lessons for New Leaders

Categories: Uncategorized

Last month I wrote about some of the lessons I had learned, often the hard way, in my work as a new leader. This was an expansion of some of the thoughts I shared with readers a number of months ago. The question around leadership has always been whether leadership is born or bred. Does leadership come naturally or is it something that can be taught over time? I have always come down on the side that leaders can be taught and trained. Certainly, charisma is more of a natural trait, but as Jim Collins pointed out in his seminal work, *Good to Great*, many of the great leaders he found in business were lacking in charisma. So while certain physical gifts for leadership can come in handy, there are no guarantees for someone who chooses to become a leader. Further, new leaders particularly are vulnerable. New leaders face a time of testing amidst the need to create trust. Often this can be a rocky road to travel. I would like to share a few more of the lessons I have learned being a new leader myself and watching new leaders as they confront the growth challenges that face all new leaders.

Last month I listed four lessons: prepare to be resisted, be judicious in your change efforts, drive with caution, and use all your gears. This month, I share a few more.

**Lesson Five: *Be Reflective.*** When you are a leader, everyone and everything will push you to be reactive. Everyone will want to know what you are going to do about each problem and issue that comes up. I always thought a great title for a book on leadership would be, *What Are You Going to Do About It?* You are the place the buck stops and people expect you to act. Don't do it. At least don't do it right away. The first action you need to take is to be reflective. Sadly, I have found that most training programs for leaders give short shrift to what I think should be the first basic skill of a leader-reflection. How can you possibly make the right choices over time if you don't first try to see the entire picture and think through possible options. Of course you can take this to an extreme and end up with "paralysis by analysis." You see all the options so clearly, you can't choose one. This calls for you to be decisive once you have reflected, otherwise you will end up with a big mess which I would call "collision by decision" which can be worse. You can teach yourself to be reflective by making certain that you read more (something most new leaders feel they don't have time for), write, or talk with others. I found mentoring people who were interested in advancement a sure way to cause reflection as they will ask you questions you might not have considered.

**Lesson Six: *Use Your Zoom Lens.*** One of the nice things about cameras is that you can use a zoom lens to move the picture closer which offers a more detailed look at the subject you are photographing. Or, you can pull back the lens for a wider angle shot which shows a lot more of the setting. Both allow for some wonderful pictures. To get a clear picture of your organization you need to use your own zoom lens to pull closer to see what is happening at the granular level and to pull back to allow you to maintain perspective. Good leaders are constantly moving between foreground and background within their organization.

**Lesson Seven: *Symbols Are Cymbals.*** One of the hardest lessons I had to learn as a new leader was that everything I said and did was magnified and pulled out of proportion. People tend to notice everything the leader say and does. They look for "signs." Once they think they have them they either act or react to them. That means sometimes people to move faster and further than you intended as

they try to manifest your desires or they drag their feet and throw up roadblocks to something they think you want that they don't want to see happen. Sometimes it just a small thing. I once noticed that a particular person in my organization seemed very distant and cold. I ask a colleague what they thought was going on and they said, "Oh, she was hurt when you didn't speak to her this morning when you came in." I realized that I hadn't even noticed that person because my mind was preoccupied with some problem I was facing. That small perceived slight was causing bigger problems because my actions had spoken loudly to them. Of course understanding this phenomenon gives you a great tool. You can use the power of symbolic action to stimulate and move your organization. I used to reward people on the staff for being able to tell me there best, worst mistake. It was my way of encouraging risk taking. You just have to stay aware of what is happening around you.

**Lesson Eight:** *Keep Your Well Filled.* When you are the leader, people come to you constantly wanting something-your attention, your sympathy, your action, or your resources. That goes with the turf of leadership. However, as you give out each day all these things others want, you will find that, over time, you run low on the things you need to be effective. They have dipped their buckets into your well so much that your well is dry. This is not good for you or your organization. You will find yourself burning out, and the people in your organization will feel unfulfilled because you have less to give them. Find ways to keep your well full and flowing. This involves maintaining a healthy balance in your own life-don't shortchange your friends and family, because they provide the ballast that keeps your ship upright. And make sure you can unfurl the sails in your organization by renewing your ideas by reading, attending meetings for new ideas or whatever.

This leads to **Lesson Nine** which is: *Use All Your Tools.* What I mean here is that you have things you know and know how to do. That is probably why you were given a leadership position. You have a good head. But great leaders also have to have great hearts. Your job as a leader is to get work done through others. If you are not clear in your love and caring for others, things will begin to fall apart in your organization. And finally you have to be in touch with your soul because that is the source of your strength and your clarity. It is the tie that binds all parts of who and what you are. As a leader you need to acknowledge and support your head, you heart, and your soul.

And finally, **Lesson Ten:** *The Organization Didn't Get This Way in a Year, and You Won't Fix It In a Year.* The hardest lesson for a leader is *patience*. New leaders move fast-their organizations don't. You have to take the small victories because they will lead to bigger ones. You can't throw a touchdown on every pass. Have the patience to allow those around you to grow with you and you can do great things together.