

Required Reading for Growing Companies



caskey's corner

By Wayne Caskey
for Smart CEO

Leadership Alignment

Does it matter what kind of leader you are?

Only if you want to shape your destiny.

We all have perceptions of ourselves as leaders - everything from "I am the captain of the ship, I am the master of our fates" to "I am their leader, where have they gone" to "Let us reason together" to "I want the best for you."

In what situations do we see our leadership skills shining - as leaders of growth, belt-tighteners supreme, technical innovators, masterful marketers, or as spell-binding salespersons?

What is leadership anyway? What do we expect to find when we make the request, "Take me to your leader?"

We're looking for someone who gets results, but how does that happen? The answer is that it depends on the situation. Two years ago in the *Harvard Business Review*, Daniel Goleman sketched six types of leaders and how they get results. He said:

1. Coercive leaders demand immediate compliance.
2. Authoritative leaders mobilize people toward a vision.

3. Affiliative leaders create harmony and build emotional bonds.

4. Democratic leaders build consensus through participation.

5. Pacesetter leaders expect excellence and self-direction, and set high standards for excellence.

6. Coaching leaders develop people for the future.

It's not hard to imagine business situations where each one of these leadership styles would be appropriate, but if we are called upon to lead in such situations, would we be up to the task? Or would our self-images of our leadership styles strait-jacket us and make us ineffective?

Some CEOs stop here. Facing up to our deficits in leadership flexibility may be painful, and we have enough pain already trying to keep this business afloat. Besides, our style works OK for now and our orientation necessarily has to be short-run. Fair enough.

But there are others of us who may need or want to increase the flexibility of our leadership style.

We may employ regular internal reflection, reading, meeting regularly with our CEO peers, coaching, or a combination of these methods. And if we persist in our efforts over months or years, we may ultimately notice more flexibility emerging and be able to align our leadership skills with the situation in which we find ourselves.

As we grow further in our ability to assess our own leadership effectiveness, we may notice that our leadership style with our management team may be significantly different than with our board of directors. This noticing may lead us to become curious as to whether our perception of our leadership style is shared by our associates. Measuring personal characteristics which make up leadership qualities becomes important to check this out. And finding a sophisticated measure of those characteristics is very important.

Last month, courtesy of the
outplacement and coaching firm,

Lee Hecht Harrison, I was introduced to the sophisticated measure Management Research Group of Portland, Maine has been creating for over 20 years. MRG's Leadership Effectiveness Analysis assessment tool divides leadership into six categories with relevant characteristics under each:

Creating A Vision

Conservative
Innovative
Technical
Self
Strategic

Developing Followership

Persuasive
Outgoing
Excitement
Restraint

Implementing The Vision

Structuring
Tactical
Communication
Delegation

Following Through

Control
Feedback
Achieving Results

Management Focus

Dominant
Production

Team Playing

Cooperation
Consensual
Authority
Empathy

Each of these characteristics is assessed not only by the leader him or herself, but also by bosses, by any peers, and by the leader's management team. Sometimes, radically different perceptions arise, giving fertile ground for subsequent dialogue.

So, suppose we've taken the LEA assessment tool described above, endured the rigorosity of comparing, characteristic by characteristic, our image of our leadership with that of our board, and that of our management team, and are working on the gaps. We are realizing that leadership exists in the eye of the beholder, and needs to be exercised with sensitivity to the perceptions of our various constituencies. We are aligning our leadership to meet the needs of the group to be led.

You say, "Hey, this is getting too complicated! It was a lot easier when I had one primary leadership style. I was comfortable with that, and there wasn't all this

hand-wringing." That's true. But who said leadership's easy?

In fact, progressively defining and broadening our leadership style, difficult as it is, pales before what's involved in committing to follow our destiny as leaders. If we are the types of CEOs who are always looking for new challenges, external or internal, here is a real challenge for us!

Joseph Jaworski, trial lawyer turned organizational guru, in his book *Synchronicity - The Inner Path To Leadership*, outlines this challenge.

Jaworski had just committed to leave his law firm after 20 years and follow his dream of founding an American Leadership Forum. David Bohm, the renowned physicist, told him "You're on the verge of a creative movement. Just go with it. You cannot be fixed on how you're going about it any more than you would be fixed if you were setting about to paint a great work of art. Be alert, be self-aware, so that when opportunity presents itself, you can actually rise to it."

Jaworski found that "acting in the belief that I was part of a greater whole while maintaining flexibility, patience, and acute awareness led to 'all manner of unforeseen incidents, meetings and material assistance which no man could have dreamed would have come his way.'"

In short, if we follow our bliss, people will open doors for us. Jaworski says, "we take on major challenges...we work extremely hard and stay totally focused - yet

it's not a struggle. In fact, it's 'effortless.'"

How often have we said, "Well he (or she) was certainly in the right place at the right time" (to get the power or money or accomplishment), "but I'm going to have to seize fate by the throat and do whatever it takes to succeed." Jaworski describes a different process. We become willing "to listen to the inner voice that helps guide us as our journey unfolds...trust(ing) in the playing out of our destiny. We have the integrity to stand in a 'state of surrender'...knowing that whatever we need at the moment to meet our destiny will be available to us...At this point, we alter our relationship to the future."

Our job as the "servant leaders" Jaworski describes is to "consistently focus... on...what we can create - and how we can collectively shape our destiny." This, Jaworski concludes, "is what leadership is ultimately about."

So, suppose we're genuinely applying ourselves to become the best leaders we can be, and we're even willing to open ourselves to the concept of servant leadership - it seems like a far distance from entering the revenue and the expense in the Quickbooks at the end of the month!

But isn't this exactly the challenge? It's Hewlett and Packard operating out of the garage - and many other great entrepreneurs running embryonic businesses, open to the unfolding reality of the future, who played their part in that unfoldment over the past

50 years - the rapid advance of democracy, the decline of totalitarianism, and the globalization of capitalism.

And this process of unfoldment is continuing and is open to you and to me, provided we're not resigned to our fate or muscularly determined to change it. Patient openness and alertness to the future of all, and our role in it as it unfolds gives us an "authentic presence" which allows us to be with others who are in the same space, and immediately doors open. As Jaworski says, "It is not strange and mystical. It's part of the natural order."

You may be skeptical. Nevertheless, you're here. So, in the spirit of leadership, try it! See whether it works for you. No doubt you have experimented with approaches to heighten and broaden your leadership skills. Think of this as an experiment to deepen your leadership, and while deepening it, to magnify its effect manifold. What greater calling could there be than to be a servant of our collective, unfolding future and align your leadership with destiny?

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