

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LEADERS AND "LEADERS OF LEADERS"

Article by Herb Rubenstein, President and Founder, The Sustainable Business Group

Introduction

Trustee Leadership. Total Leadership. Assigned Leadership. Connective Leadership. Balanced Leadership. Muscular Leadership. Toxic Leadership. Fusion Leadership. Complexity Leadership. Character Based Leadership. Emergent Leadership. Directive Leadership. Participative Leadership. Ethical Leadership. Principled Leadership. Team Leadership. Achievement Oriented Leadership. Supportive Leadership. Charismatic Leadership. Wholehearted Leadership. Level 5 Leadership. Authentic Leadership. Leadership Development. Leadership Training. Executive Development. Team Building. Coaching. Situational Leadership. Principle Centered Leadership. Values Centered Leadership. Inclusive Leadership. Servant Leadership. Transactional Leadership. Transformational Leadership. Enlightened Leadership. Leadership at Every Step. Leading Change. Values Based Leadership. Continuous Leadership. Rational Leadership. Visionary Leadership. Strategic Leadership. Virtual Leadership. Integrated Leadership. Institutionalized Leadership. Collaborative Leadership. Appreciative Leadership. Leadership as a Process. Proactive Leadership. Generative Leadership. Revolutionary Leadership. Unnatural Leadership. Empowering Leadership. Leadership by Example. Organizational Leadership. Operational Leadership. Innovative Leadership. Creative Leadership. Synergistic Leadership. Entrepreneurial Leadership. Steward Leadership. Military Leadership. Inspired Leadership. Leaders Building Leaders. Leading Upward. Tomorrow Leader. Quantum Leadership. Alpha Leadership. Lead by Design. Results Based Leadership. Trickle Up Leadership. Leaders to Leaders. Formative Leadership. Distributive Leadership. Integral Leadership. Cross Border Leadership. Invisible Leadership. Social Leadership. Contributory Leadership. Flow Leadership.

These are just some (82) of the labels or brands currently in vogue in the leadership industry today. Many of these labels describe forms of leadership or forms of leadership training offered in the current marketplace. This article takes a new look at leadership far different from any of those listed above. Our work with companies and non-profit organizations over the past two decades has shown us that there is an important, even critical distinction between being a "leader" and being a "leader of leaders." In this article, I suggest that the skills, competencies, aptitudes, values, decision making approaches, strengths, daily roles and job descriptions are radically different for the two separate categories of "leaders" and "leaders of leaders."

Just as Warren Bennis defined the differences between leaders and managers (On Becoming a Leader), this article begins to identify the real differences between the people who fit into the category we call "leaders" and the category we call "leader of leaders." I will use three examples of people who clearly fit into the category of "leaders of leaders." Many other examples exist both today and historically.

In order to introduce what I mean by "leaders of leaders," it is important to give a working definition of what a "leader" does and what a "leader of leader" does.

A Leader Is a Person or Group of People Who:

Identifies a significant gap between what exists today and an improved state that can be created in the future (Vision)

Understands enough about the causes of why the current state is the way it is so they can know which resources to gather and what forces to apply to promote the new solution (Grounding)

Identifies and communicates a clear, achievable and understandable path toward improving the current situation (Direction)

Identifies the exact combination of resources (capital, people, innovation, techniques, etc.) needed to bring about the desired result (Feasibility Planning)

Builds the organizational capacity to achieve the desired result (Developer)

Gathers and organizes all of these resources by taking into account the economics, logistics, legal and other requirements necessary to successfully deploy these resources (Collaboration)

Oversees the project and management plan (including budget) insuring that the resources used are gathered and deployed in the optimal order and amount (Efficiency)

Achieves through leadership an improvement that people can see and identify with consistent or better than the initial improvement that was first identified by the leader (Success)

Rewards the people (salary, acknowledgement, etc.), the capital (profit or stay with budget) and all resources associated with the project so that they would want to work with that leader again (Caretaker)

Identifies a new gap between a current situation and a desired outcome (Vision)

This is what a leader does. "Leaders of leaders" do not do what leaders do. They do not do the things listed in numbers 1-10 above when they are acting as "leaders of leaders."

A Leader of Leaders is a Person or Group of People Who:

Sees a series or class of problems or gaps between the current situation and a desired state of affairs (Broad Vision)

Identifies and develops workable solutions or improvements to the entire set of problems by developing rules, principles, ways of thinking, innovations and responses that address the

entire class of problems, challenges and identifies gaps that need to be fixed (Systems Solutions)

Creates a platform by writing, speaking and effectively communicating their innovations and solutions so that other leaders can use to address entire classes of problems (Platform Builder)

Creates a communication structure that gets the leader of leaders' message out to leaders and followers in a consistent and reliable manner (Manages the Conversation)

Creates a relationship with leaders so that leaders adopt the leaders of leaders' platform and begin using the new solutions, innovations of the leader of leaders to address problems and classes of problems (Enrollment)

Creates a communication system that ensures that the leader of leaders gets regular, systematic feedback from these leaders and followers using the platform and secures information to inform the leader of leaders as to what works and does not work regarding the leaders of leaders' platform (Builds and Feeds the Feedback System)

Uses this feedback to improve the platform, the solutions, the principles and rules of the leader of leaders so that the future writings and teachings become a better foundation upon which leaders and followers can use and turn to for answers and guidance (Constant Improvement)

Monitors how leaders and followers are applying the platform, teachings and innovations to ensure that the use is both widespread and consistent with the leaders of leaders' vision and ideas about how to achieve improvements (Overseer)

Takes decisive action when the platform is misused to prevent future problems (Guardian)

Sees a new series or classes of problems to solve and develops a new platform or expands the current platform (Broad Vision)

The Distinction Between A Leader and A Leader of Leaders

The basic duties and responsibilities of a leader differ greatly from those duties and responsibilities of a leader of leaders. The major distinction between a leader and leader of leaders is best exemplified by the fact that the leader of leaders develops a platform from which the leader of leader leads. That platform lets the world, the country, the state, the organization, the company or the family know how that leader would respond to a given situation. Leaders of leaders make sure that his or her platform is well known, understood and followed by those he or she leads. Therefore, when a situation arises and a leader or follower looks for guidance, that leader or follower looks to the leader of leaders' platform, teachings, writings, speeches, solutions, innovations, guidance, principles and examples, in order to figure out how that leader of leaders would have wanted that leader or follower to respond to improve the situation at hand and the world at large.

Today, leaders of leaders can lead millions of followers and thousands of leaders who in turn, use the leaders of leaders' platform to lead these millions. No leader of leader can respond to the millions of questions that leaders and followers would ask in response to specific situations. Therefore, developing and communicating that platform, that set of rules, principles, solutions, innovations, examples, and ideas in writing or in some other form of tangible, efficiently repeatable format is one of the most critical elements of becoming a successful leader of leaders.

Leaders of leaders must readily learn from those they lead. When the leader of leaders sets forth a platform, a principle, a rule, an approach to solving a class of problems or a vision of what the future should be, the true leader of leaders, must seek honest feedback regarding what works and what does not work regarding their platform from those they lead. The leader of leaders must act decisively in changing, correcting and improving their platform upon being notified that what they have communicated to the world as the path, the way, the solution is not improving the world.

Case Studies

After Howard T. Prince, II returned from service in the U.S. Army in Viet Nam he earned two of the most honored awards attainable by an Army man. He became a Brigadier General in 1990 and received the Distinguished Service Award. When he began his leadership development work for the Army in 1978 as Professor and Head of the Department of Behavioral Sciences and Leadership at the U.S. Military Academy, West Point, New York, he realized he had much work to do in the aftermath of the Viet Nam war. While at West Point, Dr. Prince was the principal architect of both graduate and undergraduate leadership programs and was instrumental in reshaping leader development throughout the U.S. Army.

Dr. Prince knew that the Viet Nam war had a profound, negative effect on Army leadership throughout the ranks all the way from the top down to the cadet level at West Point. Understanding that the situation was very serious, gave Dr. Prince an enormous opportunity since he was not only was a leader, he was a leader of leader. By being a "leader of leaders," he brought with him to his Professorship, a "platform" that include the highest ideals of service, integrity, demand for accomplishment and accountability. Most importantly, his platform included honor, the honor of service, the honor of serving well and the honor of doing a difficult job meticulously when the environment around you is anything but meticulous.

Though living and teaching his platform (which was surely shaped by the leadership training he had received in the Army, he led the charge to re-instill this "ethic" (or as we prefer to call it "a platform") into Army leadership training from the cadet level through the highest ranks of the military. From his days at the Army war college he learned The Uniform Code of Military. He knew his duty when he had the difficult task of interviewing 152 cadets at West Point who were expelled in a cheating scandal and he knew he had to reinvent a comprehensive leadership development program and a leadership culture in the Army where such a scandal could never occur again. Through Dr. Prince's leadership, his platform, and his ability to create courses to teach leadership and develop leaders, Dr. Prince's platform became again the Army's platform. It became the platform of every cadet that graduated from West Point while Dr. Prince was "on the watch" through 1990. His work shows the power of one

man to see the challenges, identify the problems without sugar coating them and using his knowledge to build what needed to be built in the army. And his work and his platform continued after he left West Point through his service as Dean of the Jepsen School of Leadership Studies of the University of Richmond and the Director of the Center for Ethical Leadership of the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs of the University of Texas at Austin.

Soon after Dick Brown took over as CEO of EDS he realized that EDS would not meet the analysts' earnings expectations. He immediately convened meetings to develop a plan to cut costs, the typical leader's response to short term earnings problems. Meetings were held and discussions seemed to take forever. Then Dick sent an email to everyone at EDS. Just sending an email to all 130,000 employees at EDS was no small task since EDS used six different email systems. Dick made sure that this problem was fixed so he could communicate whenever he wanted with every employee at EDS. His memo was simple and to the point. He told EDS employees of the earnings challenge and then asked each employee to identify a way that EDS could save \$1,000 and to let him know what they recommended and how they would accomplish it. It worked. Millions were saved virtually overnight. Dick created the platform that allowed all 130,000 people to work on a goal simultaneously. And created the system where he could communicate with them and they could communicate with him and give him feedback. And then Dick immediately focused on improving revenues which he understood required improving customer satisfaction.

The tale of J.C. Penny's is different. Allen Questrom is Chairman and Chief Executive Officer and when he took over as CEO, J.C. Penny was languishing. The prevailing approach to management was decentralized, with the store managers making buying, advertising and charitable contribution decisions. The result of this decentralization was that the "brand" of J.C. Penny was not uniformly presented to the world. Buying and other management decisions reflected more of the personal style of the store managers than the higher ups at J.C. Penny. Allen made a decision. He decided to centralize everything and took the power away from the store managers in the short run so that the central office could promote a consistent brand, create a philanthropic set of donations that furthered J.C. Penny's message and made buying decisions more uniform. In just a few quarters, Allen's new platform has transformed J.C. Penny's. In May, 2002 its earnings report exceeded analysts' expectations by 5 cents per share. Allen showed how he was a leader of leaders by creating a new platform, communicating that platform, taking the reins and getting his store managers to adopt the new platform and produce great results in a short time.

The non-profit world has its leaders of leaders. Mario Morino has done two things that fit him into this category. First, he created "netpreneur.org" an organization that gave the Washington, DC area the "social infrastructure" to become a new economy powerhouse very rapidly. He created the organization and set forth its rules, thus bringing together many leaders of the economy to begin to work together for the betterment of the area's economy and the many businesses located in the region. Mario set forth to create new rules, a new paradigm, for philanthropy, called "venture philanthropy." Mario's platform that is taking hold throughout the United States is that foundations "invest" rather than make grants, must support their "grantees" with managerial support and that grantees should be entrepreneurial and should measure the efforts they actually deliver with the funds they receive and measure the impact of their efforts in improving communities and attacking social

problems. Mario set out to improve the entire philanthropic industry, addressed a large class of issues the industry was facing and has created a framework to get feedback from the industry to improve his social venture philanthropy crusade.

Creating Leaders of Leaders

If this distinction is valid, that there are significant differences between what a leader does and what a leader of leaders does, then there is another problem. We have no system to train people to be leaders of leaders. Basically, the multi-billion dollar leadership industry, with some exceptions, has overlooked this distinction and is not developing the curriculum or tools necessary to train the next generation of leaders of leaders. It is the intention of this article to be a small start in creating this new curriculum.

About the Author

Herb Rubenstein is an attorney and the CEO of the Sustainable Business Group, Inc., a leadership and management consulting firm. He is co-author of Breakthrough, Inc. – High Growth Strategies for Entrepreneurial Organizations (Prentice Hall/Financial Times, 1999) and author of Leadership for Lawyers (American Bar Association, 2008). He has also served as an Adjunct Professor of Entrepreneurism at George Mason University and Colorado State University, is a founding director of the Association of Professional Futurists, and is the author of numerous articles on futures studies, leadership and strategic planning. He has his law degree from Georgetown University, his Master of Public Affairs from the LBJ School of Public Affairs, a graduate degree in sociology from the University of Bristol in Bristol, England and was a Phi Beta Kappa/Omicron Delta Kappa graduate from Washington and Lee University in 1974. His email herb@sbizgroup.com and he can be reached at 303 279-1878. For more information about the Sustainable Business Group, see www.sbizgroup.com.