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What, really, is leadership? and what does it look like?

You can't get succession done right if you can't answer these questions

April 18, 2013 | By [Debra Lins](#) | Comments: [0 Comments](#)



UNconventional Wisdom is a periodic guest blog, where authors hold up the so-called conventional wisdom to a fresh perspective, apply common principles in new ways, or take a new look at a longstanding challenge. To propose a guest blog, email [Steve Cocheo](#), executive editor & digital content manager.

Are leaders born or made? It seems to be a rhetorical question, as it is a bit like a two-headed coin. Yet it is a question that is debated by many community bank CEOs and presidents as they look to implement a successful succession plan for their bank, or seek to find that "perfect person" for a critical position within the organization.

Maybe the question to start with within your community bank is actually two questions:

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1. What is leadership?

2. What does leadership look like?

I suspect we all have our own definition.

As a former industry leader and community bank president for almost 20 years, I have come to define leadership as having the innate ability to motivate and inspire others to follow you on your quest through both the good and the bad times.

It's having a keen sense of focus (or what some may call "gut") to know what direction to lead in. It is the desire to develop and empower people to be the best they can be. It is the aptitude to remain humble and to be able to just stop and laugh at yourself, as no leader should take themselves too seriously.

Leadership is about gaining the trust of others and safeguarding that gift of trust as if your life depended on it, as it does. Because trust, once violated, negates any relationship.

Leadership is about having wonder, and bringing that wonder and excitement of the unknown to those you lead. One cannot master leadership. I see it is a lifelong process. As our journey in life continues to change, so we to change, as do the people we lead, and the industry we serve.

Who should be a leader?

Many have been put in a position of leadership that is not a good fit for them. They become stressed, overbearing, ineffective, cause dissension among their team members, and many times move on, or cause *others* in your organization to move on.

Over the years, I have become a strong advocate that there is no wrong person, only a wrong fit for a position.

Usually the wrong fit has to be owned by the organization due to not clearly defining what was needed for the position.

Ingredients of leadership

That being said is why as the current leader of your organization, you must pause and acknowledge the importance of detailing the qualities desired for any leadership position within your financial institution. Your list can be headed as skills, traits, or characteristics; what is truly important is to have genuinely thought-out list. I also suggest two lists.

The first list will be detailed as "required qualities," which means you will not



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waver (a must have) to be successful in this leadership role within your bank.

The second list will include all of your required qualities, with additional dream characteristics (the perfect 10). Know that there is a difference between a leader and a manager. That topic is outside the scope of this article.

What makes a leader?

We have all seen many many lists that reference the traits, characteristics, qualities of a great and effective leader. I have nothing new to add to these lists; yet would like to granulate the most common ones distinguished within the leadership books and articles I have read. These authors are insightful professionals who have studied leadership at all levels, within many organizations.

Leaders have a charisma about them that engages people to want to follow them. They are honorable and of the highest integrity. They are team-oriented, and know how to motivate their team. They are persistent, have emotional intelligence (some referred to it as intuitiveness), and amazing listening skills. They are authentic people, with a strong dedication to their organization, and a true sense of duty to the company.

Leaders know how and when to delegate and strive to empower their team. They are enthusiastic and have a high energy level. They can be known to be spontaneous risk-takers, and have a tough mindedness about them. They give respect, and in turn earn respect back from their employees, peers, and community.

This list is not construed as a comprehensive list of every trait a leader would have. Yet it includes overviews of many of common threads observed of past and present individuals in leadership roles.

In some respects, leaders can be viewed as larger than life. It has to be a role that one is comfortable in.

So are leaders born or made?

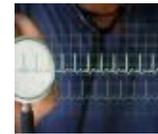
We have now come full circle, back to the title of this article. I believe it is a combination. All of us are born with innate characteristics and preferences on how to address life and people. On the other side of the coin, as individuals we are forever learning, growing, and changing; thus we can develop the traits of an effective and successful bank leader.

Now, are you looking at the right person to replace you if you are a bank leader?

The critical questions to ask as the CEO/President of your bank of a potential successor, or candidate for a leadership role is:



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1. Do you want to be a leader?

2. Are you ready to lead.?

To reiterate, there is no wrong person. Yet there can be a wrong fit for a position.

That doesn't mean you put that person back in the parts box.

All organizations need to have rewarding career paths for those that are outstanding technical employees yet do not have a desire to move into a leadership role; otherwise your organization will have the wrong fit, as these more technically oriented valuable team members move into a role that they have not aspired to. The situation may lead to a lose-lose for your organization.

It is equally as important to grow, mentor, and prepare leaders within your financial institution. If you move an aspiring individual who is not yet ready for the challenges of leading a team, department, or your bank, you can also have an uncomfortable situation arise.

I endorse taking the time to prepare for success. Pair the identified potential leader (employee) with a suitable mentor to assist with the fine tuning of his/her development. This mentor may or may not come from within your organization and could be someone outside, like a bank director or trusted community leader.

During the building stages utilize trade association schools, and outside leadership training. Expose your successor to critical thinking opportunities, and involvement in various community and trade association leadership roles. You may even want to consider meeting with a business psychologist, as they have many suitable tools, such as a Myers-Briggs test, that can assist in supporting a successful outcome.

Which is what everyone wants.

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