

Effective Leadership

Dr. Richard Boyatzis: I'm going to introduce the concept of what is effective leadership? What is the kind of leadership that excites us and make us wanting to bring our game? What I can say is that outstanding leaders know that the music of leadership is emotions, and that people who are really good at leadership are able to help inspire and help us manage our emotions in the process.

But I can't convince you of this because 60 years of research in social psychology has made it clear that you don't convince people of things by rational arguments. You convince them by emotional arguments and then you use rational arguments afterwards to make yourself feel better. But I can help you think about it through an exercise.

So I'd like you to get a pen or pencil and a piece of paper. Have two columns. On the top of the left-hand column, write the name of a leader you've worked with or for in the past that brought out the best in you; somebody who was exciting to work with; somebody who, if they took over a different division of your organization, you'd seek a transfer to work with them. If they started a project in the community, even though you're very busy, you would volunteer to work on it; somebody who you really enjoyed working with.

On the top of the right-hand column, I'd like you to put the name of a leader you've worked with or for who did not bring out the best in you, somebody who you thought was a lump. Whatever they got paid, it was too much, even if it was a volunteer organization. And then as you think of those two specific people – and to make the exercise work you have to think of specific people – start to remember what it was like to be around them. What did they typically say or do? And under each person's name, write a few observations about what they typically said or did and how they made you and others around them feel. I'm going to ask you to hit the pause right now while you do that.

Welcome back. Let's first look at the leader on the left, the one who brought out the best in you. In having this discussion with a lot of other people over the past few years in many different organizations, one of the things I'm struck with is how people say – and you might have written this down yourself – "Well, that person excited me; they empowered me. They inspired me. It was fun being around them. They valued me. They helped me to understand where I was in the bigger picture here and the purpose. They helped me to find a meaning in what we're doing. They trusted me. They engaged me personally. They asked me questions. They protected me in certain things. They encouraged me to take risks. They engaged me in ways that a lot of times people wouldn't. They made me feel a real part of things. They challenged me. Again, they excited me. Sometimes they were very competent in what they were doing, but a lot of the time it was something that they were doing with me. They made – and they seemed to have the same kind of impact on most of the other people around that they interacted with."

If we contrast that with what most people say about the person on the right, what did they typically do? "Well, they were micromanagers. They blamed us for things but they took the credit. They were demeaning. They were hostile. They were negative. They said things that made us feel like we didn't want to be there. They treated us like a resource – a human resource, not really a person. And in a lot of ways, they were very narrow or very self-centered."

These kinds of answers are things that people often talk about when they contrast these effective – these leaders who brought out the best in you compared to others who were less effective in bringing

out the best in you. What could we learn from this? First observation of this module is that you know what great leadership is. It didn't take a whole lot of time for you to think of a person to put on the top of the left-hand column, the one who brought out the best in you. You know in your heart what great leadership is.

Now you're probably sitting there saying, "Well, why is he getting so excited?" Since 1970, I and my colleagues have been doing these studies where we try to differentiate outstanding and effective managers from average and poor; and we can. And we've done this in managers and leaders in public sector, private sector, nonprofit, large, small, in over 94 countries of the world. But if we look at the data sideways, we come to a very alarming observation, that about 50 percent of the people in management leadership positions aren't adding value in anyone's point of view. Another 20-30 percent may be adding value in one person's point of view. That means that you could take 70-80 percent of the people in management jobs in your organization out of their management role and the organization would function more smoothly. That's a very sobering statistic; and one of the things it means is that the people that we're exposed to most of the time day-to-day aren't very good at it. And yet who do we try to emulate to fit in or do a good job?

So that's why I got so excited that you have a model inside. In your experiences, you have had the – the experience of being with somebody who brought out the best in you, who it you up, who helped to inspire you to bring it all. And that's what we're looking for here. That's the kind of interaction that is really dramatic. If we start to look at what you said, we start to characterize this as a difference between a relationship, which is the second major point I'd like to make – is that leadership isn't just a person. It's not a leader, it's a relationship. You can't be a leader without followers. So we're very concerned about helping you shift your focus in thinking about leadership away from the individual to the interactions, to the relationship. Because what's really important is to look at what happens between the leader and the people around him or her.

For our 2002 book, "Primal Leadership," we adopted a concept from physics to capture what we were observing in all of the research studies and our reading of other – of colleagues' research, and that is that outstanding leaders are resonant. They're in tune with you, in sync. It's a very different thing than the traditional image of a top-down leader where the leader is the person who sets the goals, the vision, the strategies, and tries to get everybody beneath them in the organization aligned underneath their view.

If you mean alignment together, in sync, then I agree with you. But this top-down alignment doesn't work. And by the way, for those having a moment of nostalgia, it didn't work in the '50s, and it certainly doesn't work in the military. Thirty-five years of research in the US Navy, Marine Corps, Army, Air Force, British Navy, and a number of other militaries around the world, make it very clear that outstanding military leaders don't use command and control. They use, in their words, ask and inspire. So this notion of being in sync with the people around you ends up being a really vital ingredient in this magical moment where people come together and they start to do more than they could have or even thought of individually.

Now when we stop and think about how that feels – and you could just think about moments that you had with the person on the left – how did you feel about what you were doing or why you were doing it? And I would expect, from a lot of other people's response to that recently, that you would say, "Well, I felt a part of something important." That's because one of the things that effective leaders do, these resonant leaders, is they help us understand the context of what we're doing.

They know that, as adults, we don't learn unless we attach new experiences onto a framework, a context. What the effective leaders do is they use the purpose of the organization as the context. It's one of the reasons why people who start management meetings with financials are really very uninspiring and usually not very effective, because they're telling everybody around them that there's a confusion between why we're doing what we're doing – the purpose – and the measures of how well we're doing.

But one of the things – for example, I had the opportunity not too long ago to witness the CEO of Ultimate Low-Tech Steam Valve Company kick off his annual meeting of his top 350 managers in Philadelphia. And it was really an amazing moment, because he said, "Thank you, good morning;" the next thing out of his mouth was the name of a small town in upstate New York. And he said, "In that town, last year, they gave birth to 350 lives. Last year, they saved 1,800 lives as a result of surgery and tertiary care. And not – none of it would have been possible if they didn't have 40 of our steam valves moving oxygen and gases through the hospital."

And then he mentioned a small town in western Pennsylvania where people – parents got up this morning, they got their kids breakfast and dressed and off to school, and they got dressed and went to work; and none of it would have been possible if the local gas and electric utilities didn't have 400 of their steam valves. As he was talking about this, you could feel something in the room go "click." And that – that click was very important because people were sitting there saying, "Hey, you know, I don't make steam valves. I make steam valves." It was a click of meaning.

So with the context being the purpose in the organization – it's what we often call vision, or vision mission, and it always embodies some aspiration for something bigger than us, something more noble, something that we're looking forward to in the future, and it stimulates hope.

The second characteristic that becomes very key to these relationships, as you were talking about, is the issue of trust and caring. We use the term "compassion." We're not using it in the western sense, or even the Buddhist sense of feeling for one in pain, but we mean it as more open and – almost out of Confucian philosophy of benevolence, opening yourself up to and caring for someone whether they're in pain or they're in joy, or they're trying to grow and develop. But the idea is that you aren't just understanding them – empathy – you're caring about them and you're doing something about it. With that combination, what happens is you feel a part of a group, a team, a unit. And when you feel that somebody cares about you, you respond and you don't want to let them down, and you care back.

The third characteristic that is always a part of these relationships, or seems to be, is what we call "mindfulness," which is kind of a psychological jargon we're using these days and something that comes out of Buddhist philosophy. But what it really refers to is – are things that you would normally say in normal language as, "Well, the person's very genuine; they're authentic. They – you know, they seem like they have high integrity." All of those things conspire to make a person who's a resonant leader more inspiring. They are more inspirational.

On the whole – and here's the question to ask yourself – when people leave your office or leave a conversation, do they feel inspired, lifted, excited? Because if they don't, then you're not being an effective leader. You might be a good person, you might be solving problems, you might be producing performance to a budget; so you're predictable, but you aren't an effective leader. Maya Angelou said, in a commencement address at Case Western Reserve University a few years ago, "It is my observation

that in the future they will not remember what you said, they will not remember what you did, but they will remember how you made them feel." And that's the effect that these resonant leaders have on us.

One of the things I'd like you to consider as an action learning assignment to do after this module, I would ask you that over the next two weeks, in every meeting or every group that you're in, take a few notes. Not just about the content so you're paying attention, but also about the behavior and the relationship that the person who's up in front of the room, the "leader" – what are they doing? Are they inspiring people or not? Take notes about the observations, and at the end of the two weeks, compare the notes.