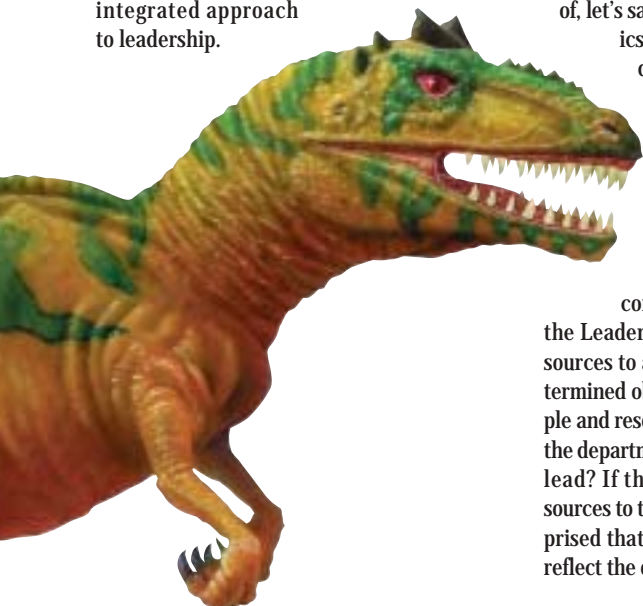


*Raging Inexorable Thunderlizard for Change*

# Leadership in Transformational Times

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**T**ransformation is the process wherein, in our current context, a significant change is undertaken and accomplished in the conduct of a legitimate business enterprise or its activity. Transformation is being undertaken all across our nation in ways we never might have imagined a few years ago, and it most certainly is taking place in purchasing organizations as a part of a broader effort. The skill sets needed to thrive in this new environment may be different from those we have employed for many years. It may also be that some of us possess the requisite talents today. If you examine the books *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*, by James C. Collins and Jerry I. Porras, and *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap...and Others Don't*, by Jim Collins, you will be exposed to a five-level pyramid concept of leadership. The key to being a great leader is to possess the attributes and the skills of all five levels in an integrated approach to leadership.



## HIGHLY CAPABLE INDIVIDUALS

In this scheme, the base level is known as Highly Capable Individuals. The principle here is that the person makes productive contributions through talent, knowledge, skills, and good work-insights. This is a simple-enough statement on face value, but it is a little tougher to demonstrate in transformational times. When the heat is on, the credibility of everything you have said and done is put on trial. Thus, this simple, base-level contribution is frequently the source of huge misperceptions.

## A CONTRIBUTING TEAM MEMBER

The second level of the pyramid is identified as a Contributing Team Member. This is to say, you make an individual contribution of your capabilities as a Highly Capable Individual to the achievement of group objectives and you work effectively with others in a group setting. Simply put, you may be the most capable individual, but if the organization you lead is perceived to be nonsupportive of, let's say, the physical plant or the athletic organization, you will have a very difficult – in fact, almost unlikely – ability to rise above being a level-two leader.

## THE COMPETENCE OF THE LEADER

The third level of leadership is concerned with the Competence of the Leader. Do you organize people and resources to achieve the organization's predetermined objectives? Or do you organize people and resources to achieve the objectives of the department, division, section, or team you lead? If the answer is that you deploy resources to the lesser objectives, do not be surprised that the results you get will perfectly reflect the objectives with which you have be-

come aligned, but not those of the organization. The consequences are clear. You may have the most efficient purchasing organization, but because you are not focused on the objectives and principles of the organization, it is all for naught. Your competence as a leader has been compromised, and others will clearly believe that you just do not "get it."

## THE EFFECTIVENESS LEVEL

The fourth level is known as the Effectiveness Level. Critical here is the most fundamental of issues: The desired result is effectiveness, not efficiency. Efficiency – long the topic of endless favoritism – moves to the sideline as effectiveness steps forward. Leaders functioning at this level catalyze an organization's commitment to, and vigorous pursuit of, a clear and compelling vision. In the process, this stimulates higher performance standards, with greater value given to and perceived by customers. It is to say that the leader demonstrates a vision, with actionable items, that effectively pulls people to a higher plane than they could achieve by themselves. They do this because they know that the end result is not a metric expressed as a unit of efficiency but as a value of effectiveness by those whom they serve. Perhaps the leading thinker on leadership, Peter Drucker, has something to share with us on this topic: "What is the major problem? It is fundamentally the confusion between effectiveness and efficiency that stands between doing the right things and doing things right. There is surely nothing quite so useless as doing with great efficiency what should not be done at all."

## THE EXECUTIVE

The final level in the leadership pyramid is the Executive. At this level, the leader instills enduring greatness through a combination of professional will and humility. This is the leadership level exhibited by the servant-

“What is the major problem? It is fundamentally the confusion between effectiveness and efficiency that stands between doing the right things and doing things right. There is surely nothing quite so useless as doing with great efficiency what should not be done at all.”

leadership definition. Robert Greenleaf wrote the definitive literature in this arena. His writings on the topic, compiled in the book, *On Becoming a Servant Leader*, edited by Don Frick and Larry Spears, is a leadership classic. Mr. Greenleaf founded the Center for Servant Leadership in 1964, after a long career at AT&T and stints as an adjunct faculty member at both the MIT Sloan School of Management and at the Harvard Business School.

#### FOUR PRINCIPLE ASSUMPTIONS

Like Mr. Greenleaf, I have spent a lifetime thinking about leadership. I have written on this topic many times for the *NAEB Journal*, and I remain vexed by the fixation we have on this topic. So it was with some delight that, on a reread of *On Becoming a Servant Leader*, I found Greenleaf's four major assumptions about leadership to be worthy of consideration in this essay.

The four principle assumptions about leadership that Mr. Greenleaf articulated many years ago still ring true today. His assumptions were: 1) We are in a leadership crisis because not enough of those who have the opportunity and the obligation to lead have kept themselves contemporary; 2) Our educational systems are not designed to prepare for leadership, most particularly our colleges and universities. They have failed. They have failed because they discourage leadership and focus, instead, on training critics and experts; 3) The value system of the Western World has been shattered, particularly our concept of moral law; 4) The forces for good and evil in the world operate through the thought, attitudes, and the actions of individual beings. Mind you now, these assumptions were articulated in the early 1970s.

You might well ask, what does this really mean? To me, it means that our obsession with leadership comes from knowing that the crisis does exist. And we see it in ourselves. We see it every day, and the institutions we work for are failing to do anything to address the crises, especially in the academia. The endless controversy and scandal in major American institutions, corporations, and the government erode what progress we have made. And finally, the events of 9/11 really demonstrate the fourth point's strength related to good or evil forces, and, in that case,

evil won the first round. Clearly, 9/11 demonstrated that thought, attitude, and the actions of individuals are being demonstrated by individuals. Taken together, it is an enormous blow, and unless each of us accepts more responsibility and accountability, this growing culture of victimization is going to be the biggest cancer among us. All our mature institutions are in turmoil: churches, schools, hospitals, social agencies, and even families. It seems that only the small and the new seem to be free of the deadly self-inflicted disease.

Despite the all-too-apparent gloom evident in the foregoing statements, I am optimistic for two reasons. First, we are blessed with many very able young people, and second, we are amazingly adaptable. The key lies in being open to the central tenet of servant leadership. My tagline for many years has been “You, too, can do great things.” For anything great to happen, there has to be a leader asking great things of themselves and those whom they lead. The great things being dreamed by those asking the question of themselves is not a dream of incrementalism. It is a dream of radical departure from the status quo. Thus, the passion I have expressed as the Raging Inexorable Thunderlizard for Change is a statement – an affirmation, if you will – of my be-

lieve that, with dreams, hope, vision, character, competence, openness, and a willingness to share, leadership can flourish! Regardless of the number of articles, training sessions, books, and institutes available, we have no fundamental recipe that yields a leader with leadership qualities. It is in every one of us; it is in our dreams. It is not the purview of some special class, nor is the answer in the DNA. It is plain and simple hard work and attention to people and to detail.

Ask yourself to do great things, and you will. Ask yourself to do what is needed to make it until Friday, and you will. It is your choice. Stephen Covey frequently talks about principles and principle-centered leadership. One of the things I have learned from him is, if you don't sharpen the saw, you can't be an effective leader. To sharpen the saw, practice what you have learned and what you have dreamed, and you will have a chance. That old adage, “If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there,” is still apropos. Just getting there isn't leadership. Remember that you, too, can do great things! ■



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