Overcoming Leadership Flaws

Flavien Shirandi
Associate Professor
Beulah Heights University
PhD Candidate
School of Business and Leadership
Regent University Virginia Beach
VA 23464

The life of a leader especially, in this 21st century looks so hard-fixed, unclear, and not so easy. Simply put,it may seem like the challenges present another world of problems to the leader. In leading others internally from inside their organizations, there is the need to lead effectively by way of motivating a diversified group of people,work across organizational boundaries, improve efficiency, and achieve growth. Some leaders fail because they behave in certain ways that reflect their personality and that limit or derail their careers. According to Burke (2006)
The leadership flaws include arrogance, aloofness, perfectionism, insensitivity, selfishness and betraying the trust of others. On the other hand, a leader who has high ethical standards and deep competence is one who desires to succeed by helping others to be better than they would otherwise be on their own; who can face reality even when it's unpleasant and acknowledge when something is wrong, and who engenders trust and promotes honesty in the organizations they create and lead (Finkelstein, 2003, p. 263).

One of the true tests of leadership is how a leader plans to overcome the leadership weaknesses, and how he displays his disposition in dealing with them. This defines the kind of a great leader one is. There are many ideas and suggestions one can borrow from on how to walk through leadership crises and some ways in which leaders can weather and benefit from them. Most concerns of leadership involve incorporating the notion that leadership is a dynamic, situation-based social process that is contingent upon culture and context. Fulmer and Conger (2004) argued that despite the characteristics of success inherent is some leaders, and the leaders' knowledge of development and investment, most organizations feel they have a shortage of effective leaders. Hogan and Hogan (2001) added that an estimate revealed that about 50 to 75 percent of leaders are not performing well; and, the number of leaders that get fired for failing to perform also has increased over the past decade while the tenure of organizational leaders has steadily dropped (Hogan, 1999). However, despite all odds, a leader can learnas much from leadership successes as from leadership failures or the dark side of leadership (Clements &Wash bush, 1999).

Leadership as a Process of Influence

Some researchers agreed that leadership is connected with the notion of change (Osborn, Hunt &Jauch, 2002; Parry, 1998); involves influencing others (Bess & Goldman, 2001; Zaccaro, Rittman, & Marks, 2001); and occurs within a group context as well as within a dyadic relationship (Hackman & Johnson, 1996; Zaccaro et al, 2001). More so, leadership involves goal attainment (Ohman, 2000).Therefore, defining leadership as a process supports the notion that leadership is more than a linear, monodirectional event. According to Neubert (1999) leadership is interactive between the leader and the follower and extends beyond the formally designated leader to include anyone taking on a leadership role. Similarly, Hackman and Johnson (1996) conceptualized leadership from the communication perspective and noted the cyclical nature of communication and leadership.

Guest (1987) argued that the ability to influence others is another defining feature of leadership and as well observed that the traditional approach to leadership has repeatedly failed to consider the reciprocal influence process. While the reciprocal influence process means that leaders influence followers and followers influence leaders, it could be posited that managers exert leadership influence over subordinates and subordinates exert leadership influence over managers. Zaccaro and Banks (2001) argued that leadership occurs within a group context and without individuals or groups to influence, leadership cannot occur. Also, for leadership to occur, there also must be followership; that is, within the group the leader influences his followers.

Therefore, leadership involves directing a group towards some end point or accomplishing some tasks. This includes defining and articulating a direction according to external and environmental contingencies for their followers, transformation, and the idea of inspirational motivation as one way of encouraging followers to envision attractive future states (Bass, 1998).

Leadership Failure/Derailment

VanVelsor (1995) noted that leadership failure has typically been considered in the context of career derailment. Equally, Leslie (1996) observed that derailment in a leadership or executive role is defined as being involuntarily plateaued, demoted or fired below the level of expected achievement or reaching that level but unexpectedly failing. To continuing to ignore the dark side will lead to an incomplete understanding of leadership; it is confusing, misleading and limiting to development of good leaders (Hogan et al., 1990).Leadership failure is primarily a behavioral issue. Leaders fail because of who they are and how they act, particularly when they are under stress. Kellerman (2004) identified seven types of common causes of leadership flaws or failure.These refer to ineffective unethical and bad leadership described as a pattern of leader and follower behavior that is maintained over time.

The seven types of common causes of leadership flaws or failure include (1) Incompetent (lack will or skill to create effective action or positive change); (2)Rigid (stiff, unyielding, unable or willing to adapt to the new system); (3)Intemperate (lacking in self-control);(4) Callous (uncaring, unkind, ignoring the needs of other); (5) Corrupt (lies, cheats, steals, places self-interest first); (6) Insular (ignores the needs and welfare of those outside the group); and (7) Evil (does psychological or physical harm to others). According to Dotlitch and Cairo (2003) great leaders can also derail from their careers by exhibiting flawed behaviors which are often closely related to the factors that made them successful. Among others, the leader behaviors that derail careers of formerly successful executives include but not limited to the following (a)Arrogance; (b)Melodrama; (c)Volatility; (d)Mischievousness; and (e)Perfectionism.

Ways to Overcome Leadership Weaknesses/Flaws

Although, leaders are vulnerable to the derailment factors; the deeply ingrained personality traits that affect their leadership style and behaviors; identifying and managing these factors may be possible; and failure can also be prevented.Coats (2014) that leadership at the core is a relationship between the leader and his or her constituents. And, becoming a better leader for your followers or the people you lead is of paramount importance, and ultimately rests on your shoulders. Coats commented that a leader cannot blame the shortcomings of his organization on his lack of growth as a leader. Regardless of the level of organizational support, a leader can still choose to keep learning, practicing, and improving in those capabilities, which inspire others to put and improve their best efforts.

Be Approachable and Human

Zenger (2013) contended that leaders need to operate in a way that treats very one round them with great respect. Zenger equally remarked that the leaders of the future must be less imperious, and also must be more approachable and human to listen to subordinates rather than telling them what to do. In order to achieve this objective Zenger and Folk man (2013) stated that leaders should learn to focus most of their energy on developing strengths that fall within five competency clusters. This will place them on the extraordinary leadership ladder. Among others, the five competency clusters include (1) character; that is integrity, honesty, doing what you say you are going to do, and predictability, (2) personal competence which includes problem solving skills, technical proficiency, and receptive to new ideas, (3) driving for results; that is setting lofty goals, having a clear view of what needs to be accomplished, being very focused and taking responsibility to achieve those goals, (4) interpersonal competency includes inspiring and motivating other people, being perceived as a good team player, and being a prolific and powerful communicator, and (5) leading, that is having a vision of the future, having your antenna out to look at what is going on in the outside world.

Avoid Trickle-down Tradeoffs

Folk man (2013) posited that when team leaders fail to decide which old directions are going to be sacrificed in service of the new direction, the tradeoff doesn’t magically disappear. It simply slides down the ladder. According to Folk man, trickle-down tradeoffs create major problems may undermine team alignment toward better ideas and conclusions about what to do and what not to do.

More so, making tradeoffs depletes our mental capacity and causes us to make poorer judgments in unrelated situations. Similarly, when your team has to spend a long morning making tradeoffs it leads to long afternoons of either staring at the wall and web-surfing, or making poor choices for their customers, their workloads, and their budgets (Folk man, 2013).

Overcome Distraction

Pater (2013) noted that distraction equates to loss of focus, and leaders who fail to keep their eye on the ball wind up vigorously pursuing secondary or even tertiary objectives while critical ones are sidelined. Pater advocated that to overcome distraction, leaders must take time to focus on the big picture, such as where the organization has been as well as the direction and strength of its momentum into the future and by assessing current obstacles to next-step accomplishments. Pater (2013) equally stated that leaders must learn to ask others to alert them when they are getting too grinded and missing important actions or trends. More importantly, clearly making better contact fills the prescription for leaders who wish to reduce disconnection. Pater concluded that face time also is important, and how leaders accomplish this is more important than just being seen. Leaders must do more than just walk through a workplace flashing a half-smile or a distributing formulaic greeting. Leaders must take time to engage in conversation with others and also should learn to ask questions.

Conclusion

The leader's character determines how he or she leads the organization, though, business knowledge and managerial skill are as well important. The higher one rises in an organization the more self-awareness lies at the center of leadership development. In order to prevent arrogance from insidiously taking over, leaders must control their own mind-set, which will help them effectively influence the mind-set of employees, supervisors and midmanagers (Dotlitch & Cairo, 2003).To assert personal control, leaders must monitor themselves for the creep of self-satisfaction; be willing to listen to their internal dialogue as well as words spoken to others about the relative intelligence of employees and midmanagers, and recognize that others have areas of experience and expertise that augment their own. Moreover, leaders can actively and sincerely invite other opinions. They should specifically solicit opposite viewpoints (Hogan, 1999).

References

Bess, J. L., & Goldman, P. (2001).Leadership ambiguity and K-12 schools and the limits of contemporary leadership theory.The Leadership Quarterly, 12(4), 419-450.

Burke, R. J. (2006). Why leaders fail: exploring the darkside. International Journal of Manpower, 27 (1), 91-100. DOI 10.1108/01437720610652862

Clements, C. &Washbush, J. B. (1999). The two faces of leadership: Considering the dark side of leader-follower dynamics. Journal of Workplace Learning: Employee Counselling Today, 11.

Dotlitch, D.L.,& Cairo, P. (2003).Why CEOs fail: The 11 behaviors that can derail your climb to the top and how to manage them. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass

Finkelstein, S. (2003).Why smart executives fail and what we can learn from their mistakes. New York, NY: Portfolio.

Fulmer, R. M., & Conger, J. A. (2004).Growing your company's leaders. New York, NY: AMACOM

Hogan, R. & Hogan, J. (2001).Assessing leadership: A view of the dark side. International Journal of Evaluation and Assessment, 9, 40-51.

Hogan, R. (1999). Trouble at the top: Causes and consequences of managerial incompetence. Consulting Psychology Journal, 46, 1061-87.

Hooper, D. (2009).Overcoming weaknesses and enhancing strengths. The Houston Home Journal,2.

Neubert, M. J. (1999).Too much of a good thing or the more the merrier? Exploring the dispersion and gender composition of informal leadership in manufacturing teams. Small Group Research, 30(5), 635-646.

Ohman, K. A. (2000). Critical care managers change views, change lives. Nursing Management, 31(9), 32-36.

Osborn, R. N., Hunt, J. G., &Jauch, L. R. (2002).Toward a contextual theory of leadership. The Leadership Quarterly, 13(6), 797-837.

Parry, K. W. (1998). Grounded theory and social process: A new direction for leadership research. The Leadership Quarterly, 9(1), 85-105.

Zaccaro, S. J., Rittman, A. L., & Marks, M. A. (2001).Team leadership. The Leadership Quarterly, 12(4), 184-451.