



PILLARS OF LEADERSHIP

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LEADERS ARE DOERS and leadership does not just happen. It stems from a purpose. It grows with involvement. It becomes stronger more exciting and effective as it makes use of those qualities proven successful by wise and creative leaders over the years—qualities undergirded by “Pillars” which provide support and purpose for leadership that makes a difference.

Leaders are everywhere. They reside in neighborhoods and communities. They serve at county, state and national levels. They are present in business and industry, and amid the professions. No group, public or private, is without its leaders. This wide dispersal of leadership is one of the great strengths of a democratic society. It was so planned by the founding fathers of this nation.

Some individuals are endowed with leadership abilities. Others behold the value of leadership in human progress and acquire it through diligent effort. Many prefer to be followers, yet, in supportive concern and involvement, there is leadership even in following.

A distinguished Chinese philosopher wrote, “Leaders are best when people scarcely know they exist, not so good when people obey and acclaim them. Fail to honor people, they fail to honor you. But of good leaders who talk little, when their work is done, their aim fulfilled, the people will all say, we did this ourselves.”

Listed below are “Pillars of Leadership” that have proven supportive.

1. Custody of Values

There are values in human endeavors to which people give top priority, and they ask their leaders to hold them in custody. No watering-down, no compromise are permitted, even under extreme circumstances, in those foundation values and beliefs which people cherish and cling to. The responsibilities of custodianship are indeed heavy, yet rewarding.

Walter Lippman once wrote “Leaders are the custodians of a nation’s ideals, of the beliefs it cherishes, of its permanent hopes, of the faith which makes a nation out of a mere aggregation of individuals.”

Among basic values in this society are dignity of the individual, privilege with responsibility and freedom to pursue one’s own potentials as a creative and responsible individual. Society places these and others in the custody of its leaders.

2. Willingness to Listen and Hear

It is so easy to listen but not hear what is being said. A willingness to listen is an act of respect extended to those who wish to be heard. A willingness to hear is an expression of genuine interest in seeking a full understanding of what those who are heard wish to impart.

An effective leader is always a good listener and seeker of understanding of what is being said. No less interest can be given, no less respect can be extended.

3. Ability to Articulate the Heartfelt Concerns and Desires of People

The ability to articulate in simple words the heartfelt concerns and needs of people is a hallmark of effective leadership. It confirms that the leader has truly walked in the shoes of those to be led.

Helping people to examine their true feelings and search out their real needs is an act of communication which is basic to effective leadership. Communication is always at its best when the chances of understanding are far greater than the chances of misunderstanding. Good communications foster trusting relationships.

4. Dispensing Hope

The future belongs to those who believe in it. Hope brings to life an excitement in conquest of a future that is demanding in commitment, yet rewarding in accomplishment. Without hope, life loses its challenges.

“Hope is like the sun, which, as we journey toward it, casts the shadows of our burdens behind us.” So wrote a distinguished leader. Hope is progressive and believes strongly in the human will. Leadership searches out hope and shares its challenges and opportunities and visions.

5. Foresightedness

The past has its lessons to teach, and must be respected. The future has rewards to share, and must be embraced. Foresightedness is cautious optimism searching out future meanings in current trends and events. It requires looking through new eyes for new opportunities and challenges, which, when discovered, become goals to be accomplished.

John Gardner, a distinguished leader, wrote that “We cannot dream of a utopia in which all arrangements are ideal and everyone is flawless. It is a dream of death. Life is tumultuous—an endless losing and regaining of balance, a continuous struggle, never an assured victory. We need a new hard-bitten morale that enables us to face those truths and still strive with every ounce of energy to prevail. We can ask no guarantee of a secure and happy future. But if we want a future that will demand the best that is in us and lend meaning to our lives, we can have it.”

6. Knowledge with Common Sense

As the available body of knowledge grows to almost overwhelming proportions so increases the responsibility to understand its practical use in the affairs of people. There is no substitute for common sense in effective leadership—the coupling of knowledge and understanding into attainable goals and accomplishments for an improvement in human well-being.

An observer of the “information explosion” said “To know a little less and to understand a little more seems to be our greatest need. “ Understanding is where the action is. He who knows and understands what he knows and how to use it for good is a wise and effective leader.

7. Integrity of Character

Integrity of character is the hallmark of leadership that seeks to make things better without caring who gets the credit.

George Washington wrote “Good sense and honesty are qualities too rare and precious not to merit one’s particular esteem. I hope I shall possess fairness and virtue enough to maintain what I consider the most enviable of all titles, the character of an honest man.”

The truth is not always easy to come by. Facts too often seem to cling to both sides of important issues. It is easy to become confused. Yet, character always speaks to what one is when and where the trust is at stake.

8. Courage to Think and Act Anew

Leaders are pioneers who possess great courage to think and act anew. Pioneers have always been individuals of great courage.

A distinguished journalist wrote that “without faith the history of man would be no more than a flock of sheep.” Faith is the very essence of thinking and acting anew.

9. Sharing of Oneself

Leadership is generous in sharing time, talent and energy in helping people to a better life, never caring who gets the credit. It ever seeks to wisely and unselfishly invest life in making a difference in how things are. It gives away what it cannot keep to gain what it cannot lose.

In sharing of oneself, “Fragrance remains with the hands that give the rose.”

10. Motivating People to Act

Leadership has accomplished its purpose when people become motivated to accept new ideas and new ways of doing things that are elevating in spirit, noble in character, and which result in a better living.

In motivation, there must be understanding, confidence and inspiration. Understanding is to know what is to be done and why and how. Confidence brings trust and resolve. Inspiration strengthens hope and faith and determination to accomplish even what seems impossible.

John Gardner wrote “Of all the things that must be renewed, none are more important than the goals and values that move people to action. Leaders must conceive and articulate goals in ways that lift people out of their petty preoccupation and unite them toward higher goals. They must assert a vision of what the nation or community might be and must help the people know what they can be at their best. Leaders have a role in creating the state of mind that is the society. They must call for the kind of effort and restraint, drive and discipline that make for great performance.”

General George Marshall described a leader as “a person who exerts an influence and makes you want to do better than you could.”