
Effective Leadership

Twelve Words To Lead By

Twelve Words To Live By

Charles A. Walker

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Foreword

This short book is called *Effective Leadership: Twelve Words to Lead By, Twelve Words To Live By*. It is about Effective Leadership and what you need to think about and do if you want to be an Effective Leader. The first chapter is devoted to a brief discussion of several popular leadership theories. After that, however, it really is not about leadership theory, strategy or management. There are no case studies to ponder and only a few examples to illustrate my points. Each Principle can be expressed in just one word, and there are only twelve of them to remember. You can write them down on a note card or the back of a business card and carry them wherever you go.

You can read this book in just one or two short sessions, but the Principles described are timeless and have been used by Effective Leaders throughout history. While you are reading each chapter, I encourage you to think about leaders you have known or have read about in the past. Which of the Principles did they practice that made them more Effective Leaders? Try to think of both positive and negative examples. Can you think of a leader who failed because he or she violated one or more of the Principles?

What about you? Which of the Principles do you practice? Most of them? All of them? If you will take the Principles to heart, understand what they mean and practice them every day, I promise you that you will become a more Effective Leader, and more important, a more Effective Person.

I will leave you with this final thought. Even though this book is about developing yourself as an Effective Leader, you shouldn't worry too much about that. Develop the person and the leader will emerge.

Charles A. Walker

Chapter One

Leadership Theory

What is a leader? When I ask this question, the most common answer I get is that a leader is one who leads. If we accept this definition, then leadership must be the act of leading. However, both definitions are circular, and are not very enlightening if we really want to understand leaders and leadership.

But there is another equally simple definition of leader that manages to capture the essential element of leadership: A leader is one who has followers. That a leader has followers, of course, is the essential element of leadership. Implied, but not stated, is that the followers follow willingly, even enthusiastically! But what makes them want to follow? Will leadership theory take us any closer to understanding why some willingly choose to follow another?

Leadership Theories: What Good Are They?

There are almost as many theories of leadership as there are leadership theorists. Let's examine some of the more popular ones. For those who wish to read more about these particular theories, there is a list of references at the end of this work.

One of the oldest theories of leadership dates back to ancient Greece and is often called the "Great Man" theory of leadership. According to this theory, great leaders are born to greatness. In other words, heredity and genetics determine certain leadership traits, which in turn determine who will be a great leader and who will not.

Belief in inherited leadership traits faded in the early twentieth century, but interest in leader traits remained and led some researchers to believe that certain traits could be found that were common to all great leaders. Roger Stogdill (1948) brought together the available research in a classic work and managed to find three consistencies: Leaders tended to be tall, smart and driven. One surprising finding of Stogdill's research was that the type of leader needed for success in a particular situation varied with the situation, which led to another theory with definite roots in Stogdill's book.

This theory is called the Life Cycle Theory of Leadership (Hersey, P., & Blanchard, K. H., 1969). Now better known as Situational Leadership, Blanchard is its most prominent champion. This theory maintains that groups go through a certain life cycle, from immature to

mature. When group members are immature, the leader must focus more on production and less on relationships. As members mature, the leader focuses equally on production and relationships. More member maturity means that the leader can devote less time to production and more to relationships. As the members completely mature, they take over the job of worrying about productivity and the leader can then focus entirely on relationships.

You've probably spotted some problems with this theory already. To begin with, it assumes that all group members are at the same level of maturity at any given time. This means that, collectively, they either can or can't be counted on to get the job done without supervision. Such homogeneity rarely exists in groups of any size. More likely, there are many levels of maturity operating within the group at the same time.

More problematic, the theory assumes that the leader will be able to change his or her leadership style at will as the group "matures." Most leaders have a preferred leadership style, and as Fiedler (1970) comments, they are not likely to change. I personally believe that it is possible in some cases for leaders to adapt their leadership styles to fit the situation. However, it requires that the leader be extremely self-aware.

Fiedler's own work, which looks at the relationship between leader behavior and the situation, is called the Contingency Theory of Leadership (Fiedler, F., 1970; Fiedler, F., & Garcia, J., 1987). In this theory the leader operates under three constraining factors. The first is Leader-member Relations, which refers to whether the members trust, respect and have confidence in the leader. The second is Task Structure, which refers to whether the members feel that the group's goals are clear and that their roles in the group are well defined. The third is Position Power, which simply asks who has the greatest amount of power, the leader or the group.

By defining any situation according to these three factors, we can determine which type of situation is more favorable from the leader's point of view. For example, the most favorable situation is one in which the leader has strong Position Power, the Task Structure is high, and Leader-member Relations are good. The worst situation for the leader is one in which his or her Position Power is weak, Task Structure is low, and Leader-member relations are poor.

This theory doesn't hold many surprises, does it? Since Fiedler doesn't think it likely that leaders are able to change their personalities or leadership styles, the only way a leader can improve a bad situation is to change it. The leader can do this by trying to improve relations with

the group, making tasks and roles more structured and better defined, and/or by trying to increase his or her position power. Experience seems to show, however, that if a leader is already in a bad situation, tinkering and manipulating will most likely create suspicion and make matters worse.

Another popular theory of leadership is called Path-Goal. Studies by Robert House (1970) and Martin Evans (1970) are considered the most fully developed contributions to this theory. Here, leadership behavior will be acceptable to group members if the behavior is seen as an immediate or future source of satisfaction. The leader's behavior will be motivating to the group members to the extent that they believe the leader is providing guidance and direction towards some desirable goal and is rewarding members for good performance.

In other words, the leader is doing a good job if he or she shows the group members the proper path to follow to achieve their goal, convinces them that they really should follow that particular path, and then rewards them for doing so. Unfortunately, this explanation evokes images of a herder trying to herd a reluctant flock of thirsty sheep towards a watering hole.

In 1964, Robert R. Blake and Jane S. Mouton proposed a theory based on what they called the Managerial Grid. The horizontal axis of this grid represents the leader's or manager's concern for productivity. No concern at all is zero on the left side of the axis and high concern is nine on the right side.

The vertical axis represents concern for people. No concern at all for people is zero at the bottom and high concern is nine at the top. A leader who shows little or no concern for either people or production is said to be an impoverished leader. A leader who has high concern for production but not much for people is said to be task oriented. A leader who has high concern for both people and productivity is team oriented. A leader who has high concern for people but little or none for production is said to be a "Country club" leader. This theory has great value for those who would like to plot themselves or someone else on a graph, but it tells us little about leadership.

Another theory, the so-called Vertical Dyad Linkage Model (Dansereau, F., Graen, G., & Hage, W., 1975) proposes that leaders aren't likely to treat all their group members the same. There will be some in the "in-group" and some in the "out-group." Those "in" are more likely to be satisfied with the leader's behavior than those who are "out," and will tend to go along with the leader's plans and goals.

There aren't many surprises in this theory. The leader's problem is figuring out how to get everyone into the "in-group" without showing preferential treatment to any one person or sub-group. I wish any would-be leader the best of luck with that problem!

These certainly aren't all the leadership theories floating around in the literature, but they seem to be the most popular and are fairly representative. And there is, of course, much more detail in each than I have covered here. However, the question I ask now is what these, or other leadership theories, really tell us about the leader as a person? Not much.

Further, except for the leadership traits aspect of the Great Man theory, which I haven't covered in any detail, they tell us nothing at all about what makes a person a leader that others want to follow! This becomes a serious shortcoming if you believe, as I do, that having willing, enthusiastic followers is perhaps the defining point of effective leadership.

Leadership theories are interesting for those who wish to study leadership, but they really tell us very little about the leader as a person. And, after all, it is a person, not a theory, who others willingly choose to follow or not.

Chapter Two

Principles of Effective Leadership

We have all been students of Leadership from a very early age. Our first examples were our parents, then possibly our grandparents, our aunts and uncles, and maybe our older siblings. Later, our teachers and clergy may have become examples. These were all persons with whom we had direct contact and could observe their leadership behavior first-hand.

As we grew older, our examples may have expanded to include persons with whom we had little or no direct contact, such as the mayor of our town, the governor of our state, or the President of the United States. With these leaders, we often must rely on what we see, hear or read in the media to judge the effectiveness of their leadership. We may actively support them, actively oppose them, or find ourselves anywhere in between.

Although support for political leaders often becomes ideologically complicated, I believe that effective leaders all share certain characteristics or traits that make them the type of persons that others want to follow. In the first chapter, we surveyed several Theories of Leadership. After reading that chapter, you know that I don't believe theories tell us much about the leader as a person, or what it takes to be an effective leader.

This is because leadership theory tends to be concerned with leadership style, leader-member relations, or decision-making strategy. These are all behaviors that can be directly observed, and social scientists who study leadership develop theories based on what they can see and measure. We can record and link behavior with outcome and measure the results.

For example, we may observe that leaders who clearly explain goals to followers get better results than those who do not, and we link better communication with more successful outcomes. However, leaders who effectively communicate with their followers are clearly different than those who don't, and that difference is subtler than whether one simply "knows" that communication is important to success. The difference lies somewhere within the leader, with his or her personal beliefs, qualities, and motivations. Leadership theories, which can tell us how a leader behaves, tell us very little about why he or she behaves that way.

To understand why leaders behave the way they do, we must look beyond theories and look at the leader as a person. First, however, we need a better definition of leader, not just any leader, but an effective leader. This, then, is my definition: An Effective Leader is one who inspires others to give maximum effort to achieve a worthwhile goal.

Look at this definition more closely. The first word I want you to concentrate on is “inspires.” Effective leaders do not use force to get others to do what they want. They do not coerce, cajole, threaten, plead, or bargain with their followers. They inspire them to do what needs to be done!

Furthermore, the followers are happy to give the leader their maximum effort. They do not show up and give a half-hearted attempt, but give it all they’ve got! But for what? To achieve a worthwhile goal! What is a worthwhile goal? Save the whales! Feed the children! Grow the business! These are all worthwhile goals, as are many others. Take over the planet? Not a worthwhile goal!

But why is it important that the goal be worthwhile? Think about it for a minute. History is littered with examples of groups whose leaders and members chose to pursue unworthy and unjust goals. In every case they failed, and often left their members, their companies, or their countries in ruins.

This discussion, though, is not about these failed ineffective leaders, although I will say a bit more about them later, but about effective leaders who led their followers towards just and worthwhile goals. And I believe that these effective leaders all followed certain principles. These principles define traits that flow from the leader's core beliefs and form the basis of how the leader acts on his or her environment and how he or she interacts with others. I refer to these traits as Principles of Effective Leadership. Some of these Principles are more trait-oriented and some are more behavior-oriented. However, I believe that they are common to effective leaders throughout history, and the understanding and practice of them are essential if you want to become a more effective leader.

A Solid Foundation

If you wish to become a more effective leader, you must start with a solid foundation upon which to build. In my opinion, Integrity and Humility form the solid foundation upon which Effective Leadership must be built, and from which all other Principles follow.

Integrity

The First Principle of Effective Leadership is Integrity. As former Senator Alan Simpson said, "If you have integrity, nothing else matters. If you don't have integrity, nothing else matters." Although I would say there are a few other things that you also need, if you don't have integrity then nothing will make you the type of effective leader that others want to follow.

Why is this the case? Integrity is variously defined as firmness of character, honesty, uprightness, and sincerity, of good moral character. (There is another definition of integrity that I believe is important to our discussion, but we will save it for later.) All of these definitions are important for those wishing to become more effective leaders because these are the things that build trust, honor, respect, and loyalty among followers. Without these things, no leader can fully expect others to willingly and even enthusiastically follow and support his or her efforts.

I might point out here that some of history's more infamous leaders have had willing and enthusiastic followers. This is unfortunately true. Integrity, or the lack of integrity, will not only influence the types of goals that leaders choose, but also the types of followers who are attracted to the group.

I don't think I need to say much more about this. However, as we go through the Principles, an interesting exercise might be to compare how two more contemporary leaders, such as Hitler and Churchill, measured up to each Principle. What were their goals? What types of followers did each attract? How did each embody or fail at the Principle, and what were the consequences to themselves and their followers?

Humility

The Second Principle of Effective Leadership is Humility. Why humility, you ask? Humility is the antidote to arrogance, and arrogance is one of the most dangerous foes of Effective Leadership. Mistakes of arrogance can bring you, your group, or your organization down faster than you can say, "It wasn't my fault!" Arrogance is false confidence, and will show its true face as soon as things go wrong.

In addition to helping you avoid mistakes of arrogance, humility will allow you to share the glory and celebrate success with your teammates. Take pride in a job well done, and pass the accolades to others on your team. In fact, this one of the most powerful tools that you have at

your disposal for building loyalty and motivation! Never be afraid that your own star might be diminished if you acknowledge the contributions of others.

Humility has one other, very important effect upon leadership. There may come a time when it may become necessary for you to step back and let someone else take the lead, either temporarily or permanently. If such a decision is best for your group, you will make it without hesitation. (All right, you're human, so maybe you will hesitate for just a second or two, but you will do it for the good of the group, and you will do it graciously and with a smile!)

A Code of Conduct

As Harvey Mackay once said in an article, "It all comes down to character." As Mr. Mackay rightly points out, credibility is lost when ethics and integrity are compromised, and such damage can rarely be undone. Although this particular article was speaking mainly about losing credibility with customers, Mr. Mackay's wisdom also applies to losing credibility with supporters, employees, suppliers, or the general public. Build your personal and your organization's ethical code of conduct on Integrity. If you make a mistake, acknowledge it with Humility, and then do your best to make it right. If you follow these rules, you will never have to worry about "damage control."

Chapter Two Discussion Questions

Note: For your examples, you may think of leaders from religion, politics, business, friends or family. They may be persons that you have known, have read about, or have studied. For each question, there are many excellent examples to be found.

1. Think of a leader who has shown great Integrity in his or her leadership. Who was that leader? What role did Integrity play in his or her success? Why was Integrity important to this leader?
2. Think of another leader who did not have Integrity. Did that leader ultimately fail? Did the lack of Integrity have anything to do with his or her failure? If so, how or why?
3. For this question, think of a leader who has shown great Humility in his or her leadership. Who was that leader? What role did Humility play in his or her success? Why was Humility important to this leader?
4. Think of another leader who did not have Humility. Did that leader ultimately fail? Did the lack of Humility have anything to do with his or her failure? If so, how or why?