

Leadership At-a-Glance

By Laura E. Wallace, CPA

Are leaders born or made, I was once asked. After some thought, I responded by saying both – leaders are both born and they are made. We can all think of leaders who seem to have been born with natural leadership abilities. But they still receive training in order to use them well. Others seem to be born without natural leadership abilities but also become great leaders through their training alone. Whether born or made, a good leader is paramount to the success of any organization or endeavor involving more than one person. So then, followers must be clear on who is their leader.

Mr. Big Stuff, who do you think you are...

A leader is identified in a couple of key ways. One is by title and position and another by role and responsibility. The right combination of the two empowers the leader. The wrong combination breeds confusion and conflict.

Various titles are given to leaders. These range from business titles such as CEO or President to less formal titles such as boss-man or boss-lady, and supr., short for supervisor. Then there are some less respectful titles that I will not mention. These are rarely heard by the leader anyway. But it is expected that a person given a title of leadership would also be given a position of reporting authority or rank within the organization. This positioning makes it apparent that they are expected to lead people and/or projects. Without the proper positioning, the title alone would carry little weight.

Lead-on then...

A leader is also known by his/her role and responsibilities. The single role and responsibility of a leader is to LEAD. Not to follow. A leader must DPEE, which stands for Direct, Prioritize, Empower and Evaluate. Regardless of title or position, a leader is not leading if he/she is not customarily engaged in these activities. To direct means to declare the vision, define the objectives, set goals and clarify the path to be taken. Prioritize means to state activities in terms of their importance and timing for completion. When a leader empowers, he/she makes available to followers the resources needed to succeed. This includes a productive work environment, training and coaching, encouragement, authority and finances. Yes, encouragement is an invaluable resource because discouraged people rarely perform well. And finally, a leader evaluates the results of the people, processes, events and tools being used.

Three questions a leader should ask in any evaluation are:

- a) What was the expected result?
- b) What was the actual result?
- c) What accounts for the difference?

These differences represent gaps in performance, application and utilization. Unless a leader knows that a gap exists, he/she cannot close it. And just as a wound without stitches will bleed, an unaddressed gap will only widen and bleed the organization of its personnel and financial resources.

So then, DPEE is fundamental to leadership regardless of environment or title. And whether born or made, a successful leader is one that skillfully applies the concept of DPEE.