



talking about...

April 2010

... *designing better relationships for better outcomes*

Defining Leadership

"An idea is salvation by imagination."

... Frank Lloyd Wright (1869 - 1959) US architect & writer

This month, we would like to start off a little differently by asking you a few questions about leadership and requesting that you reflect on your answers before reading the rest of this article.

Here are the questions:

"What does it mean to lead others?"

"What is the difference, if any, between leading people and managing people?"

"If you were leading me, where would you see yourself physically located in relation to me – above me, behind me, beside me, in front of me, beneath me (or a combination)?"

"If you were managing me, where would you see yourself physically located in relation to me – above me, behind me, beside me, in front of me, beneath me (or a combination)?"

"If you distinguish between leading and managing and also had a different physical location for each, what do you think that means you are doing differently?"

"In five words or less, please complete this sentence - effective leadership is ..."

How did you go?

Although it may not seem obvious at first, one of the key challenges of coaching in the leadership domain lies in how people define "leadership". Yet why would a definition of leadership not be obvious. Surely everyone who leads others or helps people lead others would be able to easily define "leadership". However, when we have asked a wide variety of people the questions that were posed before, they generally do not have a ready answer. Indeed, they generally seem to search for what they know about leadership and management and offer a series of loosely connected thoughts. This does not seem indicative of anything other than that people have some basic, and often unquestioned and ungrounded assumptions about what something is, such as leading and managing, and then act out of those assumptions.

Our distinction of effective leadership is quite straightforward - **effective leaders create and maintain willing followers.**

Let us break this down and see what this means.

By definition, leaders are in front of followers. The upshot of this is that leaders must do something to have others follow them. They will have to be given the authority to lead and then consistently act in a way that would maintain that authority. If the followers are to follow willingly then they are doing so because they want to be part of something, not because they feel forced to follow.

This leads us to a simple conclusion. If we want to create willing followers, we have to give them a compelling sense of why they should follow and where they are going. If we are going to maintain their willingness to follow, we have to back that up with a sense of achievement of some goals that align with the reason they wanted to be part of something in the first place. This then forms a neat cycle:

1. Develop shared meaning
2. Develop a shared direction
3. Successfully move in that direction
4. Ensure that move feeds back into the meaning

The key here is to ensure constant alignment. We know that people easily recognise incoherence or a misalignment and it is these that undermine effective leadership. It is therefore important to have a framework in which to align.

So think about the coherence of your framework of leading or managing others. If you don't have a clear one, we invite you to create one. If you do have one, we invite you to reflect on how well it is

Talking About Pty Ltd

PO Box 6652,
St Kilda Rd Central,
Victoria, 8008.

Ph: +613 9504 3558

info@talkingabout.com.au
www.talkingabout.com.au

aligned. You may find some interesting answers (and probably some interesting questions at the same time!)

"There's a fine line between fishing and standing on the shore like an idiot."

... Steven Wright (b. 1955) US comedian

Bill Gates in Heaven

God called three individuals to announce his intentions toward the human race. At the meeting were George Bush, Vladimir Putin, and Bill Gates. God announced that he was putting an end to the human race in 30 days and that each was to tell their followers.

Vladimir Putin goes back to his followers and tells them, "I have some bad news and some terrible news. The bad news is that our communist ideology was wrong. The terrible news is God is putting an end to everything in 30 days."

George Bush goes back to his followers and says, "I have some bad news and good news." The good news is our religion is correct, there is a God. The bad news is that God is putting an end to everything in 30 days."

Bill Gates goes back to his followers and says, "I have good news and better news. The good news is that I am one of the three most important humans on the planet according to God. The better news is we won't have to ship the next version of Windows."

It seems that indeed we are all different observers!

"Few people can see genius in someone who has offended them."

... Robertson Davies (1913 - 1995) Canadian author

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ACN 112 307 892
info@talkingabout.com.au
Telephone: +61 3 9504 3558