



Redefining Leadership

By
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Just as there are countless leaders engaged in the art and science of leadership today, there are no doubt countless definitions of the word leadership. Increasingly, I am asked to share my definition of leadership following one of my speaking engagements or workshops. As if I had fully solved the leadership puzzle, the person asking waits in anticipation for what they must hope is a simple answer to their question. They might have been satisfied with the answer that I would have given a year or two ago, but more than likely, they are perplexed by my definition of leadership today.

As a beginning point, it is helpful to consider that there are distinct differences between management and leadership. Chief among them by my estimation is that management is more about the process or control utilized to achieve a specific outcome while leadership is more about the system that is utilized to achieve a specific outcome. Due to the complexity of human behavior and motivation and the critical reliance on human capital to achieve any business outcome, the broader system thinking context of leadership is often more relevant and effective.

For a very long time, I was of the belief that leadership was all about people and perhaps more specifically, how one uses his or her influence to lead, inspire and engage groups of people. While this still has a lot to do with my definition of leadership it does not paint the full picture of what comes to mind when I attempt to define the word leadership at this point in late 2010.

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In times past and perhaps for most of my career, I had defined leadership in a way that in hindsight was very one dimensional. Namely, the single dimension of work or business. Not surprisingly, this single dimension was also limited by another singular view of leadership linked to one's job title. Like most people, I was of the belief that leadership capacity and opportunity were limited to people who had direct reports. After all, how could an individual contributor possibly be afforded the leadership opportunity let alone have the capacity to demonstrate leadership?

While this thinking still exists in many organizations today, the broader context of leadership has an even wider and more critical application for organizations both large and small. At an even deeper level, the world in which we live calls for true leadership outside of work too. Leadership today is by my estimation much more about the opportunity we each have to demonstrate personal leadership in all aspects of life versus the single dimension of work or job title.

With very few exceptions, most organizations today are grappling with the issue of employee engagement. At the very core of this universal leadership challenge is the unprecedented need for a higher level of personal accountability and ownership from all employees. A level of personal accountability best described as *consistently doing more than is expected well and with a good attitude*. Not surprisingly, this heightened level of personal accountability starts with the leader as he or she is the role model for the desired behaviors, attitudes and performance. Role modeling in this context is not limited to leaders as every employee is provided with countless role model opportunities each day. To be sure, every high performing organization I've ever worked with or read about has managed to instill this truth into culture and action. In helping all employees to understand their full leadership capacity, organizations make huge strides in helping them to discover their own opportunity to demonstrate personal accountability and leadership. This is far and away the sum of leadership today. It is by my estimation the level of engagement and leadership that all organizations strive for but few seldom fully achieve.

Discovering this opportunity of course does not happen by chance. As a beginning point, it is tremendously important to consider one's core values and corresponding behaviors. While writing my first book, I was struck by the clarity and resulting purpose that this awareness created among highly successful leaders. Without exception, these leaders

were not just deeply aware of their core values but perhaps more importantly, they were very clear on how they lived these values both in and out of work. The result of which was a deliberate form of leadership that allowed their values to guide them each and every day.

Allowing our values to guide us is an important part of developing our own personal leadership formula regardless of our job title, role or level of responsibility. Beyond having values clarity, it also helps to consider our intentions and the resulting purpose that both create. When we choose to explore all of this we are able to access our full capacity to lead by defining our True North which is the sum of our values, intentions and purpose.

As organizations strive for sustainable success in the year ahead, it might make sense to consider the broader context of leadership. In doing so, they may just help their employees to discover their own opportunity to demonstrate personal accountability and leadership.

10 Strategies For Accessing Your Full Leadership Capacity:

1. Find your True North by considering your values, intentions and purpose.
2. Define who you want to be as a leader and what others expect of you as a leader.
3. Examine and challenge your negative self-talk.
4. Look for more “role model” opportunities each day.
5. Make an effort to shut-off the “auto pilot” – work hard at being fully present.
6. Count your blessing more often - develop a deeper sense of gratitude.
7. Keep a journal of your leadership journey.
8. Give yourself permission to develop your own leadership formula for work and life.
9. Calibrate your compass every morning through 10 minutes of deliberate self-reflection.
10. Develop a sense of accomplishment and success by taking small steps toward your leadership development goals regardless of your job title.

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About David A. O'Brien:

David is President of CT based WorkChoice Solutions, a nationally recognized provider of leadership and team effectiveness consulting and training services. He works with a wide range of corporate and non-profit clients to help bring about sustainable improvements in organizational effectiveness. His first book, *The Navigator's Handbook, 101 Leadership Lessons for Work & Life* was released in July 2008 and is available on-line and in bookstores nationwide. His 2nd book, *Tapping Your Leadership Wisdom* is expected in bookstores next year. Additionally, his articles have appeared in over a dozen local, regional and national publications. To learn more, please visit WorkChoice Solutions on-line at www.workchoicesolutions.com