



The State of Leadership 2010

By
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I always wanted to be somebody but I should have been more specific. This famous Mark Twain line while amusing has more to do with the state of leadership today than one might think. Specificity as it relates to your leadership voice, style and purpose is rapidly becoming both a necessity and an indicator of the times in which we live. It is in no small way, a wake up call for leaders at all levels. There is a growing tide of concern among today's workforce which is driven by many factors including rapid change, the global economic crisis, absence of job security and the overall state of world affairs. People are longing for something more, for meaning and for a sense of belonging. This is at the core of today's leadership challenge and perhaps more importantly, today's leadership opportunity. An opportunity that can only be fully recognized through expanded leadership thinking and clarity. Gone are the days in which leaders can rely solely on what has worked in the past. It is no longer enough to be externally focused. Today's state of leadership demands a higher level of awareness, clarity and purpose all of which require more frequent and deliberate introspection.

The awareness factor is by my estimation driven largely by the fact that true leadership begins from within. While writing my first book, I was struck by many important discoveries about leadership excellence but chief among them was this truth. Without exception, every one of the highly successful leaders that I interviewed for the book shared this common denominator. First and foremost, they were life leaders. They were viewed as true leaders in all of their roles both inside and outside the organization. Does this just happen? Of course not. It takes lots of clarity and purpose both of which result from self awareness.



Being clear on who you are as a leader and what you stand for as a leader is a worthy goal to consider. It is important to note that your true leadership voice must include your true self. A common mistake that many of us have made (including me) on our leadership journey is believing that we must take on some other leader's persona. We think that we must subscribe to the latest leadership formula in the name of productivity or worse yet, survivability in order to be effective. Nothing is further from the truth. The fact is that within every one of us is a true authentic leader. One that has the capacity to consistently do the right things for the right reasons.

Much has been written about authentic leadership but one of my favorite books on the subject is *Authentic Leadership* by Bill George (Jossey Bass Publishing). In it, Bill makes a strong case for the value and impact of authentic leadership which as he describes, resides in all of us. Finding your own authentic leadership voice takes more than awareness. It involves an ongoing commitment to exploration, experimentation, discovery and learning.

The state of leadership today also requires leaders to explore the vast body of work on the topic of emotional intelligence, commonly referred to as EQ or EI. A good example of the urgency associated with this was illustrated at recent conference I attended. A group of distinguished leaders was asked to identify the most important development in leadership thinking over their careers. Without skipping a beat, each member of the group said that emotional intelligence was by far the biggest and most important development in leadership thinking of the past 25 years. I wholeheartedly agree as it is a fundamental ingredient of authentic leadership.



To be sure, there are a multitude of issues impacting the state of leadership at this mid point in 2010. While all of them have the potential to challenge the very best leaders, they also represent a terrific opportunity to build clarity and specificity. In knowing who you are and who you want to be as a leader, you may just discover your true leadership voice and purpose.

Five more things that you can do now:

1. Consider these three questions, *Who do I want to be as a leader, What do I want to be known for as a leader? What would it take to make 2010 my best leadership year ever?*
2. Initiate a conversation with your peer group or a trusted mentor about the characteristics that embody leadership excellence and authenticity.
3. Identify one development opportunity related to your pursuit of leadership excellence and map out a series of small, doable steps that you will take between now and year end.
4. Seek input from your team and other key stakeholders about what true leadership means to them and look for ways to role model the key behaviors.
5. Invest 3 minutes to complete the free *EQ Leadership Survey* on the WorkChoice Solutions web site @ www.workchoicesolutions.com Key words, *Learning Resources, Leadership Assessments.*

About David A. O'Brien

David is President of CT based WorkChoice Solutions, a nationally recognized provider of leadership and team effectiveness consulting services. He works with a wide range of corporate and non-profit clients to help bring about sustainable improvements in organizational productivity. 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. To learn more, please visit WorkChoice Solutions on line at www.workchoicesolutions.com or contact him directly at 860.242.1070.