Being an effective Leader

The Chinese philosopher, Lau-tsu wrote the following:

"To lead people, walk beside them . . .   As for the best leaders, the people do not notice their existence.

The next best, the people honour and praise.

The next, the people fear; and the next, the people hate . . ."

When the best leader's work is done the people say, "We did it ourselves!" It is easier to identify the characteristics that make a poor team leader than identifying the characteristics that make a successful one. A poor team leader will take one of two forms:

Form 1: A leader who is apathetic, ineffectual, cynical and interpersonally hostile.

Form 2:   A leader who is dominating, dictatorial and controlling.

The role of the team leader is to create a working atmosphere in which each member of the team can contribute. Thus the total skills and abilities of members of the team can be used to the uppermost.

The effective leader usually is able to use the following five key skills:

1. To accept people how they are, not how you would like them to be

2. To be able to approach present problems and issues in the present, rather than dwelling on the past

3. To extend the same courtesy and interest to the members of your team that you would extend to strangers

4. To trust the other members of the team and people who have an effect on the working of the team, despite the risk of trusting them seeming to be great

5. To cope without receiving constant approval and accolade.

In addition to the skills discussed above, to be an effective leader in today's environment here are 10 behaviours and approaches that every leader should have according to House and Podsakoff:

1. Vision – the Leader must have a vision that they can articulate to their followers. The Leader's vision must be in line with the morals of the followers.

2. Passion and Self Sacrifice – the Leader must have passion for the idea or subject (their vision). They have a strong conviction for their vision and will make self sacrifices in order to obtain that vision.

Girlguiding UK
girls in the lead

3. Determination, Confidence and Persistence – the Leader should have a high degree of faith within themselves and a confidence in their abilities.

4. Image-Conscious – a successful Leader will be conscious of the way that their follower perceives them they will want to be seen as trustworthy, competent and credible.

5. Role Model – the Leader will want to present themselves as a role model for their followers. This would involve identifying the characteristics that the followers identify in a role model.

6. External Representation – effective Leaders represent their company/group in a beneficial way to external organisations or individuals.

7. Expectations of and Confidence in Followers – good Leaders vocalise their high expectations of their followers and demonstrate their confidence in their followers to achieve these expectations.

8. Selective Motive Stimulation – good Leaders are able to stimulate specific motives in their followers at certain times. For example the Leader is able to motivate the want to communicate a specific idea or process during a Basic Training.

9. Frame Alignment – if the target or the focus of the group or team changes at any point, the Leader should be able to move the focus of the group to align with the change in focus.

10. Inspirational Communication – the Leader should be able to communicate their ideas in a way that inspires the other members of the group.

All of this may seem very formal when talking about a Patrol Leader in a Guide Unit, but you can see that if the individual is not a role model for their Patrol they are less likely to listen to the Patrol Leader. Or if the Patrol Leader cannot vocalise their ideas or if these ideas do not fit with morals of the rest of the Patrol then the Patrol Leader will have difficulty getting the group to work with them.

Leadership Theories

For years academics have continued to research and evolve theories around leadership. These have been based on previous research, observations and personal opinion and testimony. Whilst these theories are not based on scientific proof, they demonstrate the numerous approaches and attitudes to leadership and one of the reasons that so many forms of leadership, leadership techniques and approaches to leading a group to the completion of a task exist.

As academics have continued to write about Leadership and it has been implemented in the workplace, within teams of all levels and purposes and reached different people with different skills, experiences and expectations, a number of various theories have been put forward with regards to Leadership.

Girlguiding UK
girls in the lead

The initial belief was the assumption that Leadership skills and qualities were latent within certain individuals and could not be developed. As further and newer theories were put forward, other suggestions were made that these qualities could be developed within individuals.

Early theories around Leadership
Put forward by: Thomas Carlyle and Francis Galton (1840's)

Summary: That a leader is a leader under any circumstances – it's part of their genetic makeup.

What does that really mean? The theory was discovered through the study of the families of powerful men. The first claim they put forward based on these studies was that leadership was an inherited quality – leaders were born, not developed.

Further studies were based on these claims and a number of characteristics were named that distinguished leaders from non-leaders (intelligence, dominance, adaptability, persistence, integrity, socioeconomic status, and self-confidence among others).

In the late 1940's and early 1950's though, further reports changed the direction of this theory, Stogdill (1948 and Mann (1959) found that different situations required different types of leaders and leadership qualities. This lead to the discussion that leadership itself was not one trait, but was made up of a number of different qualities. In summary, a leader may be effective in one situation but not in another because different qualities and skills are required in each.

Leadership Theory 1: Trait theory

Put forward by: Edwin Ghiselli (1963)

Summary: Leaders who possess certain traits will be most successful in their role. What does that really mean? Ghiselli undertook various research projects and concluded that leaders exhibit a number of personal characteristics. (These characteristics though do not determine good or bad leaders). Height, weight, age, personal appearance, or form has not been found to be related to leadership performance.

The main traits identified are listed below in order of importance

Most important to Least Important

1. Supervisory ability
2. Occupational achievement
3. Intelligence
4. Self-actualisation
5. Self-assurance
6. Decisiveness
7. Lack of the need for security
8. Working –class affinity

9. Initiative
10. Lack of the need for financial reward
11. Need for power
12. Maturity.

Leadership Theory 2: Transformational Leadership

Put forward by: James MacGregor Burns (1978)

Summary: A leadership approach that causes change in individuals. In its ideal form, it creates valuable and positive change in the followers with the end goal of developing followers into leaders.

What does that really mean? Transformation is a collection of other Leadership theories and is essentially based on the Trait theory. Characteristics of transformational leaders include:

• Vision
• Excellent communication skills
• Ability to inspire trust
• Ability to make group members feel capable
• Energy and action orientation
• Emotional expressiveness and warmth
• Willingness to take personal risks
• Use of unconventional strategies
• Self –promoting personality
• Propensity to emerge during crises
• Minimum internal conflict.

When people talk about bold and charismatic leaders they are probably talking about transformational leaders. An example of a transformational leadership approach is James Kouzes and Barry Posner's leadership model developed from looking at the traits employees like to see displayed in their leaders. These can be termed competencies and include:

- Inspire a shared vision (Motivation and belief is key)
- Model the way (Living the behaviours and practices you want to see)
- Encourage the heart (People need to be passionate in what they are doing)
- Challenge the process (Learn from mistakes and don't be afraid to ask why?)
- Enable others to act (People need more than encouragement; they must feel able to put their ideas into action).

Leadership Theory 3: Situational Leadership

Put forward by: Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard (1970's)

Summary: There is no "best" leadership style as it depends on a given situation.

What does that really mean? This is sometimes called Transactional Leadership and suggests that certain contexts demand certain kinds of leadership.

Situational leadership maintains that leadership skills can be taught and improved with practice. The difference between this and Transformational Leadership is in the way that followers are motivated. (Situational Leadership motivates others by playing on their own interests, whereas Transformational Leadership looks for a greater level of interest in the end product, satisfying higher level needs).

Situational leadership is task specific. Situational leaders are interested in two things:
(1) enabling our followers to perform to the best of their ability;
(2) helping them improve.

Hersey and Blanchard have arrived at four styles of different combinations of these two basic leadership behaviours that can be used when trying to influence someone else:

- Directing (Specific instructions closely supervised until achievement)

- Coaching (Leader continues to direct and supervise but also explains, suggests and supports progress)

- Supporting (The leader facilitates and supports efforts towards accomplishment and shares responsibility for decision making with them)

- Delegating (The leader gives responsibility for decision making and problem solving to the follower.)

Girlguiding UK
girls in the lead

Leadership Theory 4: Action Centred Leadership

Put forward by: John Adair

Summary: An action centred leader must direct the TASK to be done, support and review with the INDIVIDUAL completing it and coordinate and develop the TEAM as a whole in order that the goal is achieved successfully.

What does that really mean? Adair says leadership is based round three key elements:

- Task

- Individual

- Team

Task – define the task, make the plan, allocate work and resources, control quality and rate of work, check performance against plan, and adjust the plan.

Team - maintain discipline, build team spirit, encourage, motivate, give a sense of purpose, appoint sub-leaders, ensure communication within group and develop the group.

Individual - attend to personal problems, praise individuals, give status, recognise and use individual abilities, develop the individual.

An effective leader carries out all three functions. As the situation changes or varies the leader has to respond differently.

Leadership Theory 5: Authentic Leadership

Put forward by: Bill George (2003)

Summary: Progress is achieved by working to peoples strengths, not looking at what is wrong or what their weaknesses are.

What does that really mean?

Authentic Leaders do not fake their leadership, (pretending to be a leader because of their position). They lead because they are motivated by personal belief, not because of reward, payment or status.

Authentic Leaders will display the following characteristics:

- Self Awareness
- Balanced information and unbiased approach
- Morally and ethically aware
- Transparent and trusting of others.

In summary they must have insight (vision), initiative (get up and do), influence (motivating others to act), impact (make a difference) and integrity (driven by values and what is right and wrong).

Leadership Theory 6: Transactional Leadership

Put forward by: Max Weber (1947) and Bernard Bass (1981)

Summary: It is in the best interests of the followers to do what the leader wants.

What does that really mean? There are four types of behaviours associated with this theory of leadership:

- Rewards (good behaviour is rewarded with something which motivates followers for example money or time off)
- Active Management by exception (negative feedback and criticism is used to correct errors – leaders watch out for the negatives).
- Passive Management by exception (As above but followers are less closely followed and problems only addressed when they become an issue that prevents achievement)
- Laissez – faire leadership (Leader acts the same as followers and is not concerned with achieving the goal – responsibilities are not acknowledged).

Leadership Theory 7: Participative Leadership

Put forward by: Lewin (1939)

Summary: Followers have some influence over decisions made.

What does that really mean? Four decision styles are in place:

1. Autocratic decision: the leader makes a decision alone.
2. Consultation: the leader asks followers for their opinions and ideas, and then makes the decision alone after seriously considering their suggestions and concerns.
3. Joint decision: the leader meets followers and discusses the problem to reach a decision; the leader has no more influence over the final decision than anyone else.
4. Delegation: the leader gives authority to an individual or group to make a decision.

Girlguiding UK
girls in the lead

Leadership Theory 8: Transformational Leadership

Put forward by: James Burns (1978)

Summary: The style of Leadership aims to change and transform individuals.

What does that really mean? Transformational leadership focuses on the leader engaging with followers, and creating a mutual connection that raises each of them to higher levels of motivation. A transformational leader must be attentive to followers' needs and motivations.

This is achieved by making followers aware of the importance of outcomes, getting them to put aside their own interests for the sake of the team.

Leadership Theory 9: Servant Leadership

Put forward by: Robert K. Greenleaf

Summary: This is based on the idea of the servant as a leader with the duty to serve his followers.

What does that really mean? It is the servant leader's job to make sure that the team has all the resources and processes and training it needs together with a vision that they all believe in.

The servant leader provides all the resources that the team can access and may have some duties to the team like performance management and coaching. The servant leader is not ion place because of status or their own ego, but because of their commitment to the team, cause and end goal.

Servant leadership stresses ethical practice, and makes it a leader's duty to be both ethically and environmentally aware in everything they do.

Girlguiding UK
girls in the lead

Types of Leader

The style of leadership can vary depending on a number of elements:

● The characteristics of the leader – the type of person they are
● The nature of the end task, goal or aim
● The situation in which the task needs to be undertaken and the resources available – for example material items, team members and the environment. Other factors to consider include:

● Risk factor - decision making based on degree of risk involved
● Type of business – who does it report to, what is the objective and will there always be a demand for the product or service?
● How important change is – change for change's sake?
● Attitude and culture – people's attitudes and the way they respond to change may be long embedded and difficult to challenge or amend
● Nature of the task – does it need the cooperation of others, will it fit into the existing structure etc?

The main styles of leadership can be summarised as:
● Autocratic
● Democratic
● Laissez-Faire
● Paternalistic.

Autocratic

The leader makes decisions without consulting anyone else. The team members will be dependent on their leader. This style of leadership can create a workforce who is not motivated (this style can de-motivate) and who are alienated by the leader and the task. Autocratic leadership may be valuable however in some types of business where decisions need to be made quickly and decisively.

Democratic

The leader encourages decision making and ideas from different perspectives. It will often be the case that leadership may be emphasised throughout the organisation and at different levels. A democratic leader may be consultative or persuasive.

If they are consultative, they will ensure that a process of consultation takes place before any decisions are made.

If the leader is persuasive, he/ she will take the decision and then seek to persuade others that the decision is correct (and possibly that it was their idea all along).

Democratic leadership may help with team motivation and involvement. The team members feel ownership of the team and its ideas. However, democratic leadership can delay decision making.

Laissez-Faire

Leaders who adopt a Laissez-Faire approach think 'Let it be' – they believe that the leadership responsibilities are shared by all members of the team. This can be very useful in some situations where creative ideas are important. Similarly, it can be very motivating as team members feel they have real control over the decisions and direction of the team. However, it can make decisions time consuming and give the impression that the team is lacking direction. This approach relies on good team work and good inter personal relations.

Paternalistic:

In this style of leadership, the leader acts as a 'father figure' and makes the decisions but may do so in consultation with other members of the team. A paternalistic leader believes in the need to support their team members (like a parent would support their children).

What sort of Leader are you?

A number of different tests exist, and ask a series of questions in order to determine what leadership qualities you display based on your responses.

These are not necessarily always accurate but can give guidance as to the type of leader you would make or the leadership style you may be likely to display.

These tests are useful when looking to compile a team or fill specific team roles where different qualities are essential or a certain style of leadership is required.

Girlguiding UK
girls in the lead