



Good Lord, Not Another Leadership Program

By Bill Mills

Let's have some fun, shall we? Would you say Hitler was a good leader?

It's not a trick question. Based upon most every definition of leadership that is spouted at leadership conferences, we would have to say yes. After all, isn't leadership the ability to align the efforts of others in the achievement of a goal?

How about this: was Winston Churchill a good leader? I think it depends. As a war time leader, he rallied England; as a peace time leader, he was mostly ineffective.

Let the crazy making continue! Was Ronald Regan, Jimmy Carter or Bill Clinton a good leader?

I wonder if we'd recognize real leadership if we saw it.

I humbly submit we should drop our largely useless preoccupation with leadership and focus on great managers. I've seen a lot of org charts. Have you ever seen one with the title of leader? Every one I've seen uses words like "director" or "manager," but never "leader."

A leader is what we are. Leadership is a human trait. The fact that you got out of bed and got dressed today is proof of your inherent leadership. However, great managers do something else. Great managers follow a leadership process. Great managers are held accountable for expertly administering the leadership process just as they would be accountable for administering the TQM, sales, or manufacturing process.

Everybody in your organization is a leader and when expertly managed, they will focus their leadership abilities on the right

things. Great managers evoke commitment and once committed, individuals express that commitment through self-direction.

Every organization wants results. Results are determined by the actions people take. Actions are shaped by commitment. If I didn't take the required action, I must not have been committed. What evokes commitment? We have only one tool and that is conversation. Through the quality of our conversations, we either unlock the leadership and commitment of others or not. General agreement, a New Year's resolution to try harder and even understanding is not commitment and will not engage anyone's leadership abilities.

I think we've all evaded commitments by giving others responses that mimic commitment, but leave us off the hook. "OK, I see what you mean," "I'll do my best," or "I'll get started right away," and a dozen other weary statements give the impression of commitment without the need of actually making one.

Great managers don't stop until they've evoked a promise. Poor managers stop short and live with the results of an uncommitted and only partially engaged workforce.

So what determines the quality and content of a conversation capable of evoking commitment?

Well, what determines the quality and content of the conversation you have with your child when they've disobeyed you? What determines your conversation when you're angry, happy, confident or anxious? It's your internal condition, isn't it? Your

beliefs and attitudes, your emotional state and your energy level all impact your internal condition. I will go out on a limb here. I believe we can work through 99 percent of life's issues by starting from the right inner condition.

Of course, the internal condition of the other person will play heavily in the outcome, but my internal starting point will go a long way to shifting their internal condition.

So what is this leadership process? That's exactly what we'll discuss next month when I'll meet you right here on the Inside Track.

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