

You are not a leader!!! And you never will be!!!

A number of years ago now I was working as a consulting engineer, we were sitting around our drawing boards and the discussion came up about what we would become in a few years time. I remember the discussion well, because one of the comments made in response to one person who had set their goal of becoming a leader in their field of engineering was "You're not a leader! And you never will be!" I wonder if anyone has ever said that to you? Or have you just felt it as if it was the reality for you.

I met this person a number of years later. He is now the head of a prestigious University's Engineering school and he is indeed a leader.

This then leaves us with the questions;

Are there natural born leaders? Can you create a leader out of someone who isn't leadership material? And just exactly what is leadership material? Are leaders made or born?

Theories abound. There is the "Traits Theory of Leadership Development" that says leaders must have specific traits and that is what makes them a leader. There is the "Great Events Theory of Leadership Development" that says leaders arise because they are forced to by a great event. Or there is the "Transformational Theory of Leadership Development" that says people can choose to be leaders and learn the skills.

The nature or nurture argument will continue for many years, but there is one thing for certain: leadership is a developing process. So no matter where you start from or what theory you believe in, there is room for your unique leadership in the world. Companies and people are crying out for it. You can be a leader, and you can develop leadership skills.

The reason people get frightened of leadership or say things like "You will never be a leader." probably comes about because of the word Leadership itself. One difficulty in discussing the role of the leader is the definition of Leadership. Burt Nanus and Warren Bennis report some three hundred and fifty definitions of "leadership" that leadership researchers have generated over the last thirty years.

So with all this confusion about leadership, how do you know if you are a leader or you have some qualities of a leader? - Turn around. Is anyone following you? If there is no one there you are not yet a leader. You could have the qualities of a leader but no one knows.

I was reading a great book "How to Motivate Every Employee" by Anne Bruce. The question the book asked in its first chapter is "Who would want to be influenced or inspired by you?" I believe that is the first question a potential leader has to ask of

themselves. The book goes on to say "If you cannot answer this question, then you have no business managing, (or leading) any one."

To be a leader you not only have to have or know the qualities of leadership you have to show them - all the time. In my years as consultant and manager of Development Beyond Learning, I have seen many people with the skills of a leader, I have seen people demonstrate those skills for time to time, none of these were leaders. Leaders lead all the time. Leaders develop the attitude of leadership not just the skill. Leaders that do this become first class leaders, often without ALL the skills of those 350 definitions of what a leader is but they use the leadership skills they have ALL the time. That is what makes them a leader.

In an article I read recently, it said there are four rules of leadership;

- 1) You can be a leader alone. There must be people following
- 2) You need to know what makes you tick. There will always be something someone will look up to you for.
- 3) There is always a way to get things done. A leader never quits and a quitter never leads.
- 4) The fourth rule is that there are no rules – as Nike says Just do it!

Look at some of the people the world looks up to as leaders. They developed from small beginnings and kept working on their leadership right to the end. Their stories can be an inspiration to us.

Let's take the example of Mahatma Gandhi, leader of India's independence movement. As a young man, Mahatma Gandhi was excruciatingly shy and fearful.

He mentions how ashamed he felt that his young wife had no fear of serpents and ghosts and could go anywhere in the dark while 'darkness was a terror for me.'

At his very first routine court case as a British-trained lawyer, he stood up to cross-examine but was so nervous, he could not speak and had to leave the room in total embarrassment." [Source: The Olympian, by Ron Davies]

Does this sound like a born leader to you?

When Darwin Smith was appointed to be the new CEO of Kimberley Clark in 1971, one of the board members told him that he lacked some qualification for the job.

At that time, Kimberley Clark, maker of Kleenex and other personal-use paper products, was a very mediocre paper manufacturer. What followed under Smith's leadership was an impressive transformation of Kimberley Clark to become the world's largest paper based consumer products company, even topping Procter & Gamble.

As Smith was ending two decades at the helm of Kimberly-Clark, he was asked what had driven him, what had he done to make his company so successful over time.

In the book "Good to Great" by Jim Collins, Smith reflects, "I was just trying to become qualified for the job."

Obviously, Darwin Smith realised that continuous learning was key to his enormous success as a senior leader.

So don't let anyone tell you "You will never be a leader." You have leadership skills already just use them all the time and you will be a leader.

In future articles we will be looking at how leaders can affect change that sticks, the role of coaching and the leader, negotiating to gain the advantage, self esteem- the great blocker to motivation, and is sales a process or a conversation. We also will be looking at staff retention and the keys to growth in your business. We welcome your comments on these articles. You can provide your comments or suggestions for other articles you would like to see. Please do this by sending us an e-mail at info@dblearningindia.com.

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