

Leadership Attributes

The leadership principles, process skills, and behaviors gleaned from our class conversation were extensive. I found it a difficult task to narrow down the list to one of manageable size. Rather than revisiting the list, I am accepting the result of my work to clarify those attributes important for me in leading in a living system. I am not going to try to separate principles, skills, and behaviors into separate papers; rather I will group all of the attributes together into this one paper.

Principles

Living Systems Perspective

Seeing the world and all of its systems from a living systems perspective creates the context for the rest of the work I envision as a leader. Holding a living systems perspective insures that when trying to understand issues within a community, observations are not taken out of context but always viewed as a part of the whole. This is critical to prevent the all too often action of fixing locally and damaging globally.

Transparency

Often, Vision tops the list of attributes needed in a leader and yes this is an attribute I will define. Transparency however, is essential to insure full participation in the community by all community members. Without transparency, ownership and participation in a community is limited and ineffective. The practical application is to open up conversations to all stakeholders on all facets of the community. As soon as secrecy creeps into a system, mistrust,

misunderstanding, greed, wealth accumulation, and power grabbing closely follow. Healthy communities do not exist in the cloak of secrecy.

Vision

If you are unable to paint a picture of the destination, it is very difficult for others to get there. Of equal importance, if a leader can not see beyond what is now experienced, there is very little hope of transformation. This process in my view is not leader-centric however. My vision of the leader is one who serves. The servant leader has the vision to give love to others and his/her community. The servant leader gives power to others rather than hoard it. And the servant leader helps others have authorship of ideas and work and makes sure that people have the opportunity to do significant work, work that is important to the community and is based on questions that matter.

Integrity

"The time is always right to do right." (Martin Luther King) Regardless of the difficulty or the personal pain that my leadership may create for me, I always remember Martin Luther King's words. Regardless of the choices, always do the right thing. If it is hard for me to see clearly what this right choice is, I go inside of myself to my heart and listen to what it says. It is critical for me to live my Vision, Mission, and values and this gives me the freedom to live the life I envision.

Process Skills

Asking Questions that Matter

Self-organization in human systems is founded on conversation and that conversation is based on questions that matter. Leaders must be able to ask questions that disturb the system and generate conversation. Conversation around questions that matter is critical for people to feel authorship of the ideas and work to be done as well as for people to feel they are doing work of importance.

Create Conversations

Closely linked to asking questions is the need to insure that the context for conversation is created throughout the community. A leader must not simply let this happen by chance. The creation of meeting places, forums, coffeehouses, and other places and times where people can meet and create conversations is critical. Conversation, people simply talking together, is the foundation for self-organization and emergence in living systems.

Creating Feedback Loops

Without feedback, a leader has no way of knowing what is happening or if what is happening is creating positive changes. Leaders must be connected in a real-time framework so that they are keeping in touch with their community and the systems within which the community exists. This is not a passive effort. One must actively pursue feedback and create the processes to support the feedback needed. Isolation can lull a leader into believing that he/she is in control.

Tapping into the Potential of the Team

The leader taps into the potential of the team through giving power, authorship, and significance to the members of the community. This is as much as process as it is a principle. Tapping into the power of the community must be actively nurtured and the focus must be on serving rather than control and power. In my organization, low moral is common and this may be so because the team has not been asked to participate but simply directed. This is a crucial effort in my work and summarizes much of what is said in this discussion.

Behaviors

Curiosity

Curiosity does kill the cat, but it also leads to emergence and innovation. Without curiosity, there is no reason to explore whether there is a better way. This is a foundation to learning and growth in human systems. I feel that people have two primary attributes that are important to me as a leader if I want them to learn and grow. One is willingness and the other is ableness. But to move beyond this to self-direction, one needs curiosity. Curiosity provides the power to drive the desire to learn. One can not lead without this desire. In my work, my passion for learning and growing drives me forward and helps me develop innovation for the good of the community.

Passion

If a leader has no passion, it is unlikely that he/she will pursue issues of importance. If there is no passion, there will probably be no risks taken. One does not need to be an

evangelist to have passion; a quiet passion can drive someone just as strongly as a loud passion. One way or another, passion is necessary. Passion is also the foundation for the rest of my behaviors and is a necessary component of curiosity as well.

Courage

Without courage, one can not lead. To lead is to forge trails that others have not pursued and to do so is courageous. Going against the norm and against common knowledge is the game a leader must play. Courage is necessary for my work as I am introducing new concepts in everything that I do. It can be a bit unnerving being so visible all of the time. Some times it would be nice to simply do what is expected, but leaders generally can not do that as courage is the mark of a leader.

Bias for Action

Leaders make things happen. Not necessarily by doing it, but by effectively empowering the members in their community to not only author work, but to do work that is important. This is not the vision of the lone cowboy riding into town and saving the day; this is the person who helps others achieve through giving love, power, authorship, and significance. This is the picture of the servant leader.

Persistent

Leaders do not give up when faced with adversity. They simply become more determined. If one does not follow the road that others are following, invariably, adversity will present itself. Leaders take this in stride and simply move forward, committed to their work and their community. Pain and setbacks

are common and the courage to persist in the face of adversity is the mark of a leader.

A Living Systems Model of Leadership

In the simplest form, leadership can be based in a living systems context. In a continuous loop, vision leading to action leading to feedback leading to vision and so on and so forth can explain the necessary context for leadership when this loop is inclusive of all of the attributes presented above.