



Leadership Tips for Morale Building

Peter Drucker, father of modern management, famously said, “Your first and foremost job as a leader is to take charge of your own energy and then help to orchestrate the energy of those around you”. In times so plagued with uncertainty, it is incumbent upon local and national leaders to listen to and consider their constituent’s needs and act swiftly to address their most dire ones. Now is not the time to hide behind one’s desk and dictate from afar; leaders in our community must stand up, speak out, and inspire change. So, what distinguishes a great leader from a good one? Here are some critical competencies necessary to elevate beyond the job description and enact positive change within your organization and community:

Credibility

Leaders that embody the characteristic of credibility are able to speak from knowledge and experience, both of which guide their decision-making and ability to effectively learn from past mistakes and improve upon them. It would be remiss to not mention that unfortunately, not all leaders learn from crises and grow from that adversity. In an effort to motivate significant change and opportunity, we must promote these instances.

Six years ago began the Flint, Michigan water crisis and while many of us are in the privileged position to not have recognized the continuous fallout, the consequences of this disaster have carried on with no regard for human safety and quality of life. The COVID-19 pandemic does not only create massive health risks for those exposed to it, but societal harms that when paired with previous dangers, pose repercussions that will continue to disproportionately impact those who hold minority identities in low-income regions. You may be asking yourself how we allowed this to happen and where we can go from here. Fortunately, there are great leaders that are out in the community daily, not only preaching their values, but also acting upon them. We are in desperate need of these types of individuals; those who talk the talk while walking the walk will make that change.

Empathy

One of the greats, Wes Moore, embodies all that is necessary in this period of despair for our world. Wes serves as the Chief Executive Officer of Robin Hood based in New York City and not only leads his organization with great empathy and care, but all those who follow and admire him. Empathy is critical for facing these current challenges, although oftentimes neglected, and requires a special individual to inspire this quality in their followers. In addition to his role at Robin Hood, Wes is a *New York Times* bestselling author who penned *The Work: Searching for a Life That Matters*. Throughout this journey, he profoundly asked himself, what makes a meaningful life: “Maybe the question isn’t ‘What do I want to do with my life?’ but ‘Who do I want to be? What contribution do I want to make?’ It’s not even all about altruism. It’s also about living the life that keeps you interested and engaged and passionate--and that leaves you feeling fulfilled”. Wes’ empathy transcends his organizational role to his thought leadership on

incredibly critical topics, ranging from poverty in New York to holding corporations accountable for embracing and uplifting diverse individuals in leadership capacities.

Vision

Leaders to look up to are those who hold compassion and thoughtfulness to the highest degree. The May 29th, 2020 Institute for Sustainable Development webinar featured Seth Diamond, Chief Executive Officer of Westchester Jewish Community Services, and examined psychology, morale, and mental health during COVID-19. Mental health and wellbeing is critical to the relief and recovery process for people of all backgrounds. Individuals are experiencing grief on various levels, as well as considerably increased stress caused by numerous circumstances. As the head of this human services agency, Seth is responsible for supporting those who provide the necessary services to their community and constituents through imparting positive messaging and promoting mental health outcomes that ultimately lead to long-term mental wellness. He suggested that leaders must pay close attention to the present moment, while also considering the future and the outcomes of all conversations held and decisions made. This vision takes time and maturity to develop in an intentional manner. Be mindful of the repercussions of your words, actions, and choices - these define who you are as a human being and in your leadership capacity.

Sense of timing and appropriateness

An individual that has been ever-so-present from the very start of the pandemic within the greater St. Louis community is Peter G. Sortino Director of the Gephardt Institute for Civic and Community Engagement, Stephanie Kurtzman. Her thoughtful and consistent leadership has given the Washington University community the necessary information, and even more so, the solace that has allowed us to reach this point that we are now at. This sensitive demeanor provided her the ability to appropriately address concerns and help us realize that these dark moments will finally see the light. Without diminishing the clear problems, Stephanie led with the facts and with the purpose of acknowledging the extreme grief and loss faced by many. Nobody is immune to the problems caused both directly and indirectly by the COVID-19 pandemic. Her work does not stop here; the Gephardt Institute is further committed to addressing the inequities brought to light from the pandemic: "If ever there was a time for civic engagement, it is now. It will take all of us". With so much hate and vitriol spiraling in this world, to have an individual to rely on provided many, including myself, with the comfort and support they yearned for.

Whether at the individual, community, or societal level, leaders are responsible for fostering the morale of their constituents and followers and motivating them to create a chain reaction of impactful social change. Certainly an individual needs to work on and develop each one of these essential skills with appropriate guidance and mentoring. Some do this more successfully than others and what distinguishes them is that they embody the necessary combination of the elements of credibility, empathy, vision, and sense of timing and appropriateness, as well as their ability to lead with both their head and their heart.