

What Makes a Good Leader?

By Jeffrey T. Spiegel, CPA

119 Paddington Circle

Smithtown, NY 11787

631-724-1725

jtscpa@gmail.com

www.jeffspiegelcpa.com

Just because you have followers does not make you a good leader! There have been too many individuals throughout history who have been leaders but did nothing but to lead their followers on paths of destruction and self-destruction.

Being a good leader is not an easy task. Each of us has the basic abilities to lead. What we need to learn and develop is how to use those talents for the benefit of our businesses, those who work for and/or with us and of course ourselves. Organizations exist for a number of reasons; to make money, be productive, govern or enforce. All of these reasons have many things in common but the main factor is that they all require someone to lead. The leader must provide the vision, mission, values and strategies in order to define the core ideology and create the organizational boundaries. A good leader will also surround themselves with good support people and competent managerial leadership who also believe in their vision.

Providing a clear vision and mission for a business gives the employees a cause and gives the organization a purpose. Individuals want to contribute to something meaningful. People work hard for something they believe in and when they know that what they do makes a difference. It is up to the corporate leadership to ensure that the employees know that they are appreciated and that there is value in what they do, no matter how minor their contribution may seem in relation to the whole.

Values are very important, especially when there are so many uncertainties, as there are in the world today. The values drive and legitimize behavior, for the individuals as well as for the organization as a whole. Values flow down so it is important that the leaders of a business are clear as to their own values. They need to lead by example related to values and work ethic. It should be clear where they stand on the various issues related to the business and they should not be afraid to get their hands dirty when it comes to actually getting the job done. All leaders at some point were employees and they refined their leadership abilities due to the examples others set.

A good leader will also facilitate the creation of a strategy to accomplish the work of the mission and to achieve the goal of the vision. A good strategy will provide the guidelines or the road map that will assist in achieving the desired end results. A good leader will not micro manage to the extent of telling people how to do something, but will rather outline the basic strategy. George S. Patton once said "Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do and they will surprise you with their ingenuity."

As a leader, as part of the basic strategy, you must also know how to fail quickly. Don't be afraid to abandon a failing strategy as it will not help you to achieve your goals. You must also be able to learn from your successes. Use what works and get rid of what doesn't.

The leadership trait that ties all of the above together is communication. If a leader is unable to communicate then the ideas, vision, mission, etc. will get no further along than their own minds. They must be able to express themselves effectively and in a way that makes people want to listen and be a part of their vision. Jack Welch once defined a leader as "someone who stood out visibly and said 'this is where we are going, what we are doing and how we'll get there.'" Great leaders are also great communicators but great communicators are not always great leaders.