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10 Things Thriving Leaders Need to Know

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Well-run, thriving organizations happen on purpose, not by accident. Therefore, leaders need to master 10 things for their organizations to thrive.

Gaining these competencies requires real commitment by leaders and their organizations -- a kind of commitment that leads to a high-performance culture, greater customer loyalty and, ultimately, a more robust bottom line.

Know yourself and your impact. Just as the saying goes, “First love yourself, then you can love others,” so it goes with leadership. When leaders understand their own strengths, challenges and their impact on the people around them, they can adjust and shift to the needs and people of the situation. Without self-awareness, few other competencies gain traction.

Know your people. Each person is motivated intrinsically and extrinsically by a variety of things linked to personal values and beliefs. Most people are motivated by genuine appreciation. Any number of factors come into play — family, money, status, challenge, team members, responsibility, etc. The leadership challenge is to discover what works for whom. Leaders can only know the answer to this by taking the time to really know their people — style, what engages, interests and motivates them to deliver the best work. Trying to take one-size-fits-all approach is a non-starter. It takes less time, but it gets lousy results.

Know your stuff. People expect their leader to have enough knowledge to guide them well. For leaders then, there are two important skills sets to have: technical and leadership. Leaders can be successful having fewer technical skills than their team when they lead well. Technical experts with no leadership skills will not be successful in a leadership role, regardless of how smart they are or how much they know about their discipline. The skill sets are opposite.

Know your organization and how to influence it. Great leaders lead through influence far more than authority or a heavy hand. To do that well, one must understand the myriad of interconnected relationships and networks at play at any one time. Knowing how to communicate, get things done and make decisions within the culture at hand will make or break a leader in his or her role.

Know your customers. Everyone has customers, regardless of the business — for-profit, nonprofit, education, health and government. Great leaders continuously scan, ask and educate their customers, learning what they know and value versus what the organization is delivering, and then close the gaps where they exist. Only the arrogant leader assumes he or she “knows better” what the customer needs or wants than the customer does.

Know your boss and your peers. The networks and protocols within every culture drive how decisions are made and how well work gets done. To get work done well, leaders need to tap into the knowledge, skills and abilities of both their boss and their peers. Depending on direct reports and a few insider pals alone is a sure-fire way to lose influence.

Know your vision, mission and values. And know what they mean. This is true on both the personal and organizational levels. Mission equals purpose and reason for being; vision equals a passionate dream for a future state; and values equals how people are expected to behave in carrying out the mission and striving for the vision. Good decision making relies on being very clear about, and focused on, these three key elements to organizational and personal success.

Know your change process, use and communicate it. More than 70 percent of change efforts fail in the U.S. A key reason for this is not poor logistics or bad ideas, but poor planning and process. Many leaders push versus pull change through their organizations. This is a fatal mistake. When people are not on board, there is little buy-in, and lots of resistance, even for positive changes.

Know your decision-making process. Most people can live with decisions when they know who the decision maker is and how and when the decision will be made. Leaders who fail to decide well confuse their people and disrupt their business.

Know how to build and maintain great teams and facilitate great meetings. Few leaders are trained in facilitation skills for groups or teams. Every meeting needs to be planned and facilitated well, or a lot of time and energy are wasted. Teams need to be developed, led and monitored continuously. Great leaders understand and appreciate this and either develop or add these skill sets to ensure their team’s time is maximized.

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