



LEADERSHIP IN THE OFFICE

Admiral Sir James Burnell-Nugent



Leadership is not a black art. It can be learned, practised and polished by anyone who is prepared to make the effort. In that sense it is no different to other professional attributes required whatever your field. If you want to get better at it – you have to spend time on it

All of us could improve our leadership in one way or another. You might find it helpful to read this pamphlet when you join a new organisation, or are promoted, or take on new responsibilities. Six months later it may be worth having another quick read to help review and refresh your leadership. It might also be able to give you personal guidance if you are confronted by a particularly difficult leadership challenge.

Improved leadership leads directly to improved effectiveness. We have recognised the gains of the Scientific Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, the Social Revolution and the Computer Revolution. The next step up in performance needs to come from a Leadership Revolution.



Leadership style

Study of great leaders, past and present, shows that in one way or another they had the gift of getting people to give their best. We are all born with an individual set of talents. We can acquire some more; but others are difficult to develop. For example, communication skills can be improved in most people, but the lack of a sense of humour is more difficult to change.

The first thing to do in developing your own leadership style is to make the best use of what you have and not to worry too much about what you have not. A sense of humour is certainly a great help on many occasions, but there have been many successful leaders without one.

To develop and build on each talent you need to match your own character and personality to the range of leadership tools and qualities. There is no mould or blueprint. But do not hesitate to follow the example of others whose leadership you admire, provided there is some match to your own personality.

So you must be yourself and not pretend to be what you are not. You must also be ready to adapt your leadership style to varying situations. Being first on the scene at a road traffic accident calls for very different style of leadership to chairing a meeting. There is nothing dishonest about adapting your style to suit the situation - indeed it is good leadership to do so.



Leadership - through qualities or through application?

Drawing up a list of the qualities desirable in leadership has the unfortunate effect of making us feel terribly inadequate. There is comfort in the knowledge that even the greatest leaders can be faulted in some respect.

Concentrating solely on the application of leadership has drawbacks too. For example, mastering the host of modern communication techniques will be less effective if you cannot deliver the message with confidence and commitment.

Some might think that a qualities approach is more about leadership and an application approach is more about management. Many hours can be wasted discussing whether management is the servant of leadership or vice versa. In practice, great inspiration tends to fail without sound management and highly organised management tends to fail without inspiration. So we must all try to develop those personal qualities which underpin our leadership style and, at the same time, work at the practical functions of leadership in our daily lives.

For ease of presentation and consideration, this pamphlet first makes suggestions about the application of leadership and then highlights valuable leadership qualities. But in your own mind ensure the two are interleaved, or preferably indivisible. If you think some are under the wrong heading, then you are getting warm!

The Author

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