Leadership and Followership

Leaders are found all around us every day. You can observe them in some very formal settings and in some very informal settings—like on the bus on the way to class. Leaders are a crucial part of our world helping others achieve what needs to be done in a given situation, or working toward a common goal. There would be no leaders if there were no followers though. Commonly seen as a bad thing, being a good follower is in fact just as important as being a good leader. It is impossible to be a strong leader if you are not a strong follower.

Leadership Defined:

A leader is not necessarily someone who holds a formal position of leadership or who is perceived as a leader by others. Rather, a leader is one who is able to affect positive change for the betterment of others, the community, and society. All people, in other words, are potential leaders. Moreover, the process of leadership cannot be described simply in terms of the behavior of an individual; rather leadership involves collaborative relationships that lead to collective action grounded in the shared values of people who work together to affect positive change. – Higher Education Research Institute

Traits of Good Leaders:

Model the Way – leaders create a standard of excellence and set a positive example for others to follow. They establish standards for how people should be treated, and ensure these standards are followed. They help others find their way, and create opportunities for victories.

Inspire a Shared Vision – leaders believe they can make a difference, gain the support of others to reach the goal, and get people to see the possibilities of reaching the shared goal.

Challenge the Process – leaders search for ways to change the status quo, they look for variation, take risks, and experiment. They accept risk-taking as being a part of leading.

Enable Others to Act – leaders encourage team work and personal growth among members. While building mutual respect between members and themselves, leaders strive to establish trust and dignity within the group.

Go to the People
Learn from them
Live with them
Start with what they know
Build with what they have.

But of the best leaders,
When the job is done,
When the task is accomplished,
The people will all say,
“We have done it ourselves.”
-Lao Tzu, 604 B. C.
Encourage the Heart – leaders recognize contributions of others, share the rewards, and make people feel like the heroes.

**Followership Defined:**

Followership is the willingness to cooperate in working toward the accomplishment of the group mission, to demonstrate a high degree of teamwork and to build cohesion among the group.

**Traits of Good Followers:**

Sometimes being a follower is seen as a negative trait, when in reality it is one of the most important skills a leader can have.

**Personality** - it is important to have a “sincere liking and respect for other people” in combination with a good sense of humor, a willingness to work in teams, and to be willing to be a good team player.

**Communication Skills** - must be able to understand and communicate in written and verbal terms with the leader and other team members. This includes being able to handle difficult situations and being supportive and constructive in all communications with team members and the leader.

**Cooperative/Dependable/Team player** – a key part of being in a leader/follower relationship is being dependable and ensuring that as a follower your leader can rely upon you to carry out the task as intended.

**Dedicated/Loyal** - being dedicated and loyal to a leader/group is crucial to the success of the group but it should never come at the sacrifice of an individual’s moral and ethical code.

**Persistent/Patient**- the key is to know when to be persistent and when to be patient. Talk with the leader/team members when it is not clear if you should be persistent or be patient in a situation.

**Perceptive**-the ability to be sensitive to others wants and needs is one of the best ways to show your willingness to be a good follower/leader. This is best accomplished by being a good leader and by acknowledging the importance and value of each of the individuals within the situation.

**Honest/Trustworthy** - being true to your own ethics is the foundation of any good person, especially a leader/follower. Being honest and trustworthy is something you should consistently work to accomplish.

**Prepared** - being prepared and organized allows for you to show your ability to work within a team. If you are not prepared all of your other skills/traits may be overlooked.