

## *Missing Pieces*

by

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Is it possible that business has fewer of the right kind of leaders today than it did nearly 20 years ago? I am referring to those who exhibit a good balance of personal depth, emotional strength and administrative discipline.

If this is true, why?

One reason could be too much focus on technique and not enough on the trade of work. Leadership is meaningful but hard work no matter the situation. When is the last time you attended a conference on working hard?

Another possible answer to our original question lies in the failure of leaders to learn from their experiences. Someone once said that those who are not open to counsel can't be helped. Often good development programs are offset when individual responsibility to keep learning disappears.

The person most responsible for development is the leader, not the educator or trainer.

Is there hope for this situation?

Are there other things needing attention when it comes to chiseling one's character traits as a leader?

What's missing that often undermines well-intended people?

The first missing piece is...

- Credibility. It's difficult if not impossible for people to follow someone they don't believe in.

You have to offer reasonable grounds for being believed even if you are young or in your first major assignment. Relationships are built on trust. Call it authenticity or transparency if you like.

Are people sometimes misled by their leaders? Too often this is a reality in all kinds of organizations. Yet as someone once famously said, you can't fool all of the people all of the time. Weakness in character comes out at some point. This type of behavior can do a great deal of damage until it's discovered and the person either gets helped or is removed.

Maybe a coach is what you need. Timely interventions by trusted individuals nearby or far away may be more important than formal reviews separated by long intervals. Few, however, change their behavior with coaching.

One way to understand credibility is to think about what impresses you in a leader. Matching words with deeds is very important no matter where on the planet you happen to be.

Why does this type of behavior stand out? Because so few engage in it.

Measure your words. Promise less. Deliver more.

The second missing piece is...

- Communication. I am referring here to interpersonal or social communication, not necessarily oratory or elocution. Most of a leader's communication is one-on-one or small groups. An overlooked tool is conversation.

The writer, Alan Barker, put it this way:

*“Conversation is your primary management tool. It's how you build relationships with colleagues and others. It's how you come to understand what people think and how they feel. Conversation is the way you influence others and are influenced by them. It's how you solve problems, cooperate with others and create new opportunities.”*

This is good advice.

Two-thirds of any conversation is listening and listening is hard work.

Why?

While someone else is talking we often keep our brain in gear waiting for just the right time to speak again. By doing this we hear little the other person has said.

Many gain leadership positions in spite of being poor listeners. How this happens is often a mystery to me.

When is the last time you really listened to staff? Board members? Customers?

Is two-way communication a missing piece? Then practice the habit of asking good questions. Find out what interests the other person.

It's one thing to know about your people. It's another to know your people. Understanding this difference improves and strengthens relationships.

The final missing piece is...

- Collaboration. This is a contemporary word that has its roots in a simpler term, cooperation.

There are things you can do on your own such as sharpen a pencil or take out the trash.

If you want to move a baby grand piano on a stage Steinway recommends at least one person be assigned to each leg with rollers.

If you are trying to build a great company it's going to take enough of the right people laboring together to achieve common goals.

Even though succeeding generations appear to have a collaborative ethos this does not remove the need for someone to lead, direct and follow-up. It does, however, change the look of the organization from leadership at the top to leadership throughout.

Are you comfortable with an organization filled with strong and gifted leaders?

While the task determines the form of collaboration here is a practical way to begin. Start by asking people what you can do to help them. Learn to cooperate with others, first.

Then see if there is a difference when asking for their help in getting something done on your list.

### **Final Thought**

It takes practice and discipline but these missing pieces, and others you might identify, can be placed in your life and work.

There's hope after all.

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