

On Leadership

I recently stumbled across a report on the most important character traits of leaders. Those traits were described as creativity and optimism.

While this may sound strange at first, I actually agree to it. To better understand the choice of these attributes it is necessary to differentiate between Management and Leadership. Not all managers are leaders but all leaders have management skills.



Think of it, managers often work with existing routines. Managers are needed in organizations to fulfil a particular task. They are optimizers of the existing structures and strive for efficiency in a known environment. On the contrary, leaders venture into new “unchartered” territory while, often at ease, gathering followers along the way. They find new and creative ways of doing things and challenge existing norms. Leaders also tend to see solutions that others simply cannot see as they lie outside of their routines and norms. It is their enthusiasm that inspires others and creates a loyal follower base.

The leader’s persuasiveness brings out the best in the followers and encourages them to reach for new heights. In fact, leaders make others around them see their potential as they convince them to become better than they ever hoped for. One could even say that leaders create leaders by convincing them to share the vision and believe in their own talents. Of course, this only works with sincerity and trust-worthiness. This is why leadership is not a one-off activity, a vision without belief but a constant process of articulating their ideas with verve and optimism.

So let me end with a practical example fitting for the international workers day: If the manager of a struggling company is cutting cost and making people redundant the leader of the same company will inspire people by sharing his vision of how the future of the company will look like and how it can be achieved with a different use of existing resources.

Or as Mary Parker Follett puts it: “The most successful leader of all is the one who sees another picture not yet actualized. He sees the things which are not yet there”.

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