

Crossing The Leadership Threshold

Leadership is not defined by title or position, experience or accumulated knowledge, posits Jared Lafitte, founder of Lafitte Coaching, in a recent Forbes.com article. Despite being in positions of power, there are numerous examples of some, who have great expertise and experience, yet are poor leaders.

Lafitte believes that leadership is a practice requiring mastery of several key behaviors that transfer vision and motivate action. Like any behavior, these are meant to be learned, practiced, repeated and sharpened. He suggests that leadership should be pursued primarily as a set of practices to be developed and not as a position to be attained. When leaders learn to make this distinction between position and practice, they cross what Lafitte terms the "leadership threshold:" a conceptual line that divides leadership based upon expertise, experience and authority (positional leadership) from leadership grounded upon behaviors and practices (behavioral leadership).

What behaviors and practices must a leader assume to cross the leadership threshold? Lafitte offers five and explains that a leader must take on these practices and prioritize them to affirm their leadership role.

Conviction is a sense of how things must be or become. It's an ongoing, internal commitment to something greater, something that transcends the current tasks at hand. Ask questions like, "What is the meaning behind what I'm doing?" "Why do I need to be a part of the lives of others?" and "What has convinced me?" You can't lead people somewhere unless they are convinced they must go there.

Connection means delivering your convictions according to the language and paradigms of those around you. Ask, "Have I found the common ground between what I want and what my people want? "Have I created a path forward that helps them see their contribution to the big picture?"

Communication is packaging your message into clear, action-oriented language and committing to consistently expressing what's most important. Understand that language creates culture and shapes behavior, and stay on message.

Passion is the meaningful expression of one's conviction. It's a genuine, ongoing communication about where you want to go and why you want to go there. When others sense your passion, it gives them passion as well.

Vision means that a leader understands and communicates a clear picture of success, including how the team contributes to it and achieves it at each step. Know how to combine big picture with small steps, to bring together vision and contribution. Vision without contribution is merely poetry and contribution without vision is merely a job.

In crossing the leadership threshold, one must move from executing and performing tasks personally to motivating and influencing others. The problem is that many leaders don't consider behavioral leadership as a skill set to be developed the way their technical skills were once developed. Often leaders see these items as personality or intangible qualities that some "are born with." This is short-sighted thinking because every organization rises and falls on the abilities of its leaders to empower and engage their people, and if leadership is only a rare personality trait or a lucky quality bestowed on a few, then we are all subject to the mercy of the gene pool.

Lafitte believes that while some are born with more dispositions toward leading, leadership is a set of skills anyone can develop and improve. You can't just accumulate knowledge to cross the leadership threshold, rather, you can begin taking steps to develop the behaviors that will get you there.