

What Makes a Leader

As we head into what will probably be the defining moments of this Presidential primary campaign, voters have surely been contemplating some of the following questions about the candidates and they will certainly continue to consider the answers as the field narrows.

What makes a leader? Is leadership a genetic trait or a learned ability? Are men better leaders than women? Is leadership ability universal or situational?

In a recent article, which appeared in the American Chronicle, Kathy Marshack a psychologist and family/business coach examines some of these questions that research has yet to answer.

While leadership is one of the most often talked about qualities of our political candidates, there is no doubt that leadership development is also one of the major concerns of American businesses. Organizations are constantly faced with the problem of developing leadership skills among executives and high potential managers. These same executives and managers may be highly skilled in their particular specialty, but lack what it takes to lead larger groups of people to excellence.

The qualities of a leader are many and to some extent the type of leadership style that works in one setting may not work in another. What is common to all successful leaders however, is the ability to communicate with subordinates, colleagues and superiors. The self-assured leader communicates this confidence and encourages the best from others.

It may be that some people are just born to lead, but with training in communication skills, a natural leader may be discovered who may otherwise have been overlooked. The kind of skills that will enhance any leader's position and that could create a leader from someone with raw talent, are what Marshack refers to as the "resilience factor." Within this factor are the qualities of flexibility, win-win philosophy, quality over quantity, toughness, and foresight.

No matter what surprises lay in store for this leader, he or she is flexible enough to do what works in the moment. He or she can learn from even the lowest employee in the hierarchy. Doing things fast is replaced by doing things thoroughly, efficiently and with quality. The leader who has mastered good interpersonal skills has a devoted work force and clientele. Therefore, taking the time to do it right and to learn from others pays off.

Resilient leaders recognize the abilities and talents in others as well as themselves. These leaders realize that their greatest contribution is their ability to lead, to cultivate excellence in others, and to create a quality business with longevity. Without developing the interpersonal skills that create trust and confidence in the leader, this becomes a much more arduous task and in many cases, just not possible.