

# PUTTING YOUR COMPANY UNDER A MICROSCOPE

- A Continuing Series of Management Insights from The Jennings Group -

## INSPIRING LEADERSHIP

By Olin R. Jennings

**W**hile most companies have good managers and are well managed, many presidents tell me that their companies are facing significant leadership challenges. These issues are affecting their firms' ability to achieve their full potential. The Jennings Group has considered these issues, reviewed leadership literature, discussed leadership with presidents, and included what we believe about leadership in this article and our own leadership development program.

**Leadership vs. Management** Leadership can be described as doing the right thing. Management is doing things right, but not necessarily doing the right things. Leaders typically have a unique view of failure. There are mistakes or less effective ways to do things, but not failures. Every mistake helps shape the ultimate success.

Leaders are characterized as charismatic, visionary, and so on. In fact, the characteristics we associate with true leadership often seem so remote that many people assume that they never could be real leaders. Nothing could be further from the truth. Unfortunately, that sense of frustration is reinforced by the traditional model for companies – a balanced company needs senior level business leaders, managers, technologists, and others. True, we need people in these positions, but this model focuses on managing (doing things right) and discourages leadership (doing the right thing).

**Our Vision For Leadership** My belief is that you do not have to be in a management position to be leader. You can have leaders in every area of your company – technical or technology leaders, leaders in reinforcing values, practice or business leaders, macro leaders at the corporate level, and so on. Accepting this belief, and using it as a management principle, represents a paradigm shift – everyone can be, and should be, a leader.

Our vision for a successful company is *every employee a leader* in something. The result is leadership in depth. This vision makes focusing all of these new leaders, new ideas, and energy in the same direction any president's biggest management problem. What a great problem!



**Growing Leaders** Leadership appears to be stifled in our society and in too many companies. People naturally focus on technical skills and managing the process or service product. Training in schools focuses on technical skills or management skills. Companies need and reward these skills. They also reward leadership, but do not invest enough effort in developing or inspiring leadership in their managers and senior professionals.

You may say "It's easy to describe the vision, but how do you get there?" We believe that everyone has some level of leadership ability that can be enhanced and drawn out, but that leadership cannot be taught. It must be inspired.

In our research, we identified four essential characteristics for real leaders:

- A vision of what can be or should be;
- The ability to communicate that vision;
- Knowing yourself as a first step to leading others;
- Knowing others – to motivate and bring them together in a common vision.

If any element is missing, the ability to be a leader is hampered. Some of these elements are a matter of training, but others require inspiring, personal self evaluation, and coaching. A common problem in leadership training is the failure to recognize that leadership must be inspired.

**Having A Vision** Many people go through life focused on their day-to-day activities. Their vision for their life is more subconscious and not thought out or well defined. We all know people like that. It does not mean that they cannot be leaders. They are just missing a key ingredient of leadership – a well defined vision of what can be or should be.

This vision is more than words. It is something you are committed to that becomes a part of the fabric that is you. Your vision is like a road map for part of your life. It sets your destination point and influences your decisions. Creating this vision kindles enthusiasm to excel. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have

a dream” encapsulates the concept of a vision that motivates and drives.

**Communicating Your Vision** Communicating your vision does not require charisma. Some of the best examples of communicating a vision are living that vision personally, in such a way that others are drawn to the same vision. Understanding that words have different meanings to different personality types changes the way you present things to others, so that the words have more meaning to them. These, and other tools, can be taught and practiced.

**Knowing Yourself** It is difficult to lead unless you know who you are. A friend of mine, president of his company, told me that solving this problem was his biggest difficulty in inspiring leadership in others. Knowing yourself is connected to (1) having a vision, (2) recognizing your strengths and weaknesses as well as the barriers that keep you from exercising your strengths, and (3) understanding your own personality and how that influences what you do and say. “Knowing yourself” cannot be taught, but a few concepts and non-threatening one-on-one discussions can help with the introspection and personal understanding.

**Knowing Others** Understanding others is much more than knowing who they are. We believe that knowing others includes understanding different personalities and what motivates or de-motivates them, recognizing the concept of giftedness, investing in people, and other principles. Knowing others can be accomplished by teaching (learning several concepts and how to apply them), applying these concepts, and investing in other people.

**Benefits Of A Leadership Culture** Inspiring leadership down into your organization and

developing a *leadership culture* yields benefits that keep on giving, including:

- Careers that are more personally satisfying – people are recognized as leaders;
- Less contentious, less competitive, and more supportive environment – everyone is a leader;
- People maximizing what they can do because they are driven by a clear personal vision;
- Aura of almost limitless opportunity;
- High morale which helps overcome turnover and recruitment problems.

**Developing Your Leadership Program** A leadership culture cannot come from training alone. As we learned in creating our own leadership development program for our clients, leadership must be inspired and coached. It requires (1) training seminars for some basic concepts, (2) thoughtful personal introspection, (3) confidential one-on-one coaching or mentoring sessions to help inspire/refine individual personal visions and help each person to “know thyself” better, and (4) facilitated discussions to ensure that all of these new visions and leaders are focused together to the benefit of the company. The senior management team also needs to brainstorm and problem solve on how to develop and implement leadership in depth and create a leadership culture.

Filling the leadership gap is today’s greatest challenge in many companies. Presidents and CEOs who fill this gap will be rewarded with a more vital and exciting organization, and the delightful problem of finding the best way to channel all of those new leaders for the dynamic growth of the company.

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