



TAKE CHARGE

A Simple Guide To
Effective Leadership

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***“The very essence of leadership is that you have to have vision.
You can't blow an uncertain trumpet”***

- Theodore Hesburgh -

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Chapter 1

The Leadership Gene



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The matter on leadership and genetics has been discussed and researched on for as long as the concept of leadership was created. Research efforts have been poured into exploring the link between the two. Are leaders born or made? This is going to sound cliché but until now, genetics is still considered a big factor in determining the formation of leaders. But not everyone thinks the same way. There could be some truth to it but factors such as experiences and social dynamics are also important in leadership. There is no single factor that will determine the person's ability to lead. Each factor is important up to a certain extent.

Some scientists feel strongly about genetic and biological factors and their link with leadership. The interest in the link between genetics and leadership are sparked by people from the same family that assume leadership positions in society. The Kennedys and the Bush family are two examples. More than genetics, science is also looking at biological and physical traits that leaders possess. There are studies that show how genetics contribute to the physiological and psychological functions of a person. These will eventually affect the person's cognitive and behavioral traits, which determine if the person is fit for leadership. Hormones and chemical changes in the body affect a person's cognitive functioning, a very important aspect of leadership.

When it comes to leadership, it's always a question about nature vs. nurture. However, both are intertwined with each other and cannot be separated. Leadership cannot be discussed without considering both at the same time. Case in point would be chemical and hormonal changes in the body that will affect the disposition of the person. The disposition will affect the attitude and behavior, which are huge factors in leadership.

An example would be a person that is suffering from a bipolar disorder. People with bipolar disorder tend to exhibit very drastic mood swings, easily switching from euphoria to depression. There are several causes of bipolar disorder, including neurotransmitters that are hereditary. Their bipolar tendencies will affect their personality, which will affect their leadership style. This is not to say that bipolar people are not capable leaders. In fact, the greatest leaders in the world were reportedly bipolar (e.g. Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill, and Napoleon Bonaparte). Their drastic mood swings, however, may have negative effects on their leadership and establishing trust with their followers.

As said earlier, you cannot rule out the external factors (nurture) in leadership. The Kennedys may be a family of leaders but take note that the members are exposed to the same environment and values. They are exposed to almost the same group of people and circumstances. Even if genetics played a big part in their leadership streak, you cannot take away the fact that they thrive in a common environment. They were exposed to the same kind of experiences and brought up by the same set of people who share the same values as well. They are also bound to develop similar opinions on important issues and perhaps, develop the same leadership style.

There are certain environments that are conducive for molding leaders. The environment plays a huge role in shaping the ideals, opinions, and values of a person. If young children are brought up by parents that promote pro-social behavior, the children will grow up overcoming unreasonable aggression and form healthy relationships with their peers. Role models account a lot for the formation of leadership traits in a person. When a child is surrounded by people with strong leadership attributes, the child

will most likely imbibe these attributes as well. Likewise, children surrounded with aggressive role models will most likely turn out to be aggressive. Aggression and social skills are very important in leadership because to be an effective leader, the individual must be adept in dealing with people. Leaders have to establish rapport with their colleagues and subordinates.

In general, many leadership attributes are shaped by external factors. Even if there are claims that leadership qualities are inherent in a person, the fact remains that a person will continue to develop for as long as he or she is alive. Some traits will be more developed by others. The attitude and personality of the person will be influenced by the people around him or her. Other environmental factors that affect the person (e.g. political atmosphere, economic conditions, life-changing events) will also determine the set of leadership traits he or she will possess. Such are the formative experiences that can possibly produce a leader.

Related to the formative experiences are the social dynamics that the person is subject to. For instance, a certain female may have good social-skills and strong conviction but her leadership qualities may not shine to its full potential if she is in a society where males are always considered the alpha figure. She may have the leadership potential but if she thinks that males are always the rightful leader, she will not be able to exhibit her leadership qualities to their fullest. The position in the family is also an example of the impact of social dynamics on leadership. Many first-borns are usually molded to become leaders, although not all turn out to be good leaders.

Social dynamics are huge factors to a certain extent, similar to genetics and formative experiences. All three contribute to the development of a leader. Some people may or may not have inherent leadership qualities but experiences and relationships in life will affect the attitude of the person. Leadership qualities may be enhanced along the way. One's growth and development is certainly crucial in determining if the person is fit to be a good leader.

Leadership styles vary but surely, there should be common qualities that are common among great leaders. The attributes will gauge if the leader is doing a good job in serving his or her purpose.

Good leaders make a good first impression not because of their skills and achievements. Although these are important, these aren't the first things that their people notice. People are drawn to leaders that are oozing with charisma. Charisma is a very attractive and inspiring trait that many great leaders possess. Identifying charisma is not easy because it cannot be articulated instantly. Charisma is a combination of many things – the way a person stands, moves, speaks, etc. Charismatic leaders have a vision (which will be discussed later) and the ability to articulate this vision. They should also have the ability to communicate with as many people as possible in an emotional level. Charismatic leaders make other people feel that they are able to relate with their plight, something that's not very easy to do. Some people think that charisma is something that cannot be learned. For them, it is an inherent trait in every person. You either have it or you don't. But modern thinkers beg to disagree with this mindset. They think that people can eventually learn to be charismatic, starting with being courteous, polite, and respectful. The point is to be "likeable" and "relatable" to other people. Charismatic leaders make other people feel that they are able to not only understand their situation, but also relate to it as well. Not all have this ability but some are able to build charisma through age and time.

Leadership requires good people skills and sensitivity to others' needs, also building blocks of charisma. After all, leadership would not exist if there are no people to lead. People skills are built on the small things that people don't forget. For example, they appreciate it when new acquaintances remember their names even if they've only met a few times. Charisma can eventually be developed, as long as the person remembers to make other people feel comfortable and important.

Leadership starts with a focus and vision. Leaders are not required to be all-knowing individuals but they should completely know the purpose and vision of the organization they are spearheading. It is only by having a focus that a solid commitment and responsibility can be formed. Also, a leader

must have the competence required in his or her field. Again, he or she need not be all-knowing but sufficient knowledge in the field is required to make sound judgment calls.

No leader can withstand the challenges of leadership without courage and strength in character. Of all the members in the organization, individuals holding leadership responsibilities cannot be swayed by just anything and anyone. The leader must remember the purpose and vision of the leadership in any decision-making process. The leader must have enough courage to stand up to anything or anyone that threatens to undermine that vision. Good leaders are also assertive in getting the job done and upholding the organization's vision. He or she must be assertive enough to get people to fulfill their duties.

Good leaders should always arm themselves with creativity and resourcefulness because some situations will require them to think outside the box. Not all problems can be solved by textbook formulas and tried-and-tested solutions. They must have enough courage to veer away from the conventional in order to find better ways of doing things.

Finally, a good leader should have loads of passion and a sense of servitude. Leadership is no easy feat and if a leader attempts to fulfill his or her duties devoid of any passion, he or she might not endure the challenges. Leadership is a rollercoaster experience and without passion, the leader might find it difficult to accept the difficulties. As for the sense of servitude, leaders cannot lead if they do not know what it is like to serve. Besides, the leader's purpose is to serve the organization and not just to order people around.

The following chapters will delve into what makes a great leader and how one can achieve the status, despite the challenges. They will also help the reader improve their existing leadership skills and give them a peek of what is in store for them as leaders.

Chapter 2

Becoming a Great Leader



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Different leaders have different leadership styles but all of them need to learn how to deal with human nature. This is not such an easy task considering the diversity of human nature. Great leaders have the ability to understand and work with different attitudes and personalities. To be an effective leader, one must develop fine social skills in order to relate with different kinds of people. The people skills are crucial in empowering people, which is a primary task in leadership.

The author has chosen two main factors to discuss when it comes to empowerment. The first one, empathy, is crucial in establishing open communication lines among people in an organization. The second one, motivation, is important getting a team to be productive.

Empathy

A good leader must learn how to empathize with the people he or she will work with. Empathy is a person's ability to show concern and understanding of other people's perspectives. Empathy should not be confused with sympathy. When you are sympathetic with others, you identify with them to the point of agreeing with the person's actions and plans. Empathy is not agreeing with a person. Empathy is being able to put

yourself in another person's position and understand their thoughts and feelings.

Empathy does not mean agreeing with the person all the time. Empathy only entails understanding one person's point of view, even without giving advice. An effective leader needs to exhibit empathy towards other people. It is crucial in building trust and strengthening relationships among people. Productivity increases when the people working together share a healthy relationship. Empathy allows leaders to dig deep into the root cause of poor performance without being judgmental. By putting themselves in the shoes of other people, they can make better changes in people's lives.

Empathy plays a huge role in empowering people. You don't have to agree with each and every viewpoint but as a leader, you have to let the people around you realize that you understand them and know where they are coming from. When reaching out to people, don't let your thoughts be clouded by judgments right away. Showing empathy takes time because it is not always easy understanding why people think and feel the way they do. By creating an environment where people feel that they can be comfortable expressing their opinions and thoughts, you can open yourself to empathic listening.

When talking to people, assure the speaker that he or she has your undivided attention. When people are about to confide their problems, they feel more comfortable when they are assured of full attention. Listen to the speaker with an open mind and heart. Resist the temptation to pass judgment. This can be difficult at first because biases are almost unavoidable but the awareness that you have your own set of biases should help you keep yourself from making judgments right away. Avoid interrupting the speaker at all times, even if you feel strongly about something. Don't be afraid of moments of silence. After the speaker has aired his or her thoughts, a short pause would allow him or her to make sense of the situation and come up with his or her own solution. While the speaker is talking, don't just listen to the words that come out of the mouth. Make sense of the emotions attached to those words. More than the words, you should be able to respond to the speaker's emotions. Ask relevant and

sensible questions to assure the speaker that you are interested and that you want to understand him or her. Oftentimes, the speaker will feel more at ease just by the mere effort and gesture.

Motivation

Good leadership certainly entails superior motivational skills. Part of empowering people is to be able to motivate them and get them moving. As a leader, it is important to know what motivates the people around you. Needless to say, motivation goes hand in hand with empathy. Each person has different aspiration, dreams, and interests. A good leader needs to tap into these in order to get each member of the group moving. People work for many reasons – income, self-fulfillment, growth, etc.

The leader must make an effort to talk to the members of his team individually to get to know each person's source or sources of motivation. The common misconception of most leaders is that all members of the team are motivated by the same factors. Some members can possibly share the same aspirations but it does not always apply to everyone. Motivation can be very personal, making it difficult for inexperienced leaders to motivate each and every member of the team. When it comes to motivation, there is no such thing as “one size fits all”.

The most common forms of motivation come from oneself, otherwise known as internal motivation. Motivation comes from within, which is why leaders should maintain good communication lines with their members to determine what motivates each member of the team. There are external factors that motivate a person but these factors also have to be harmonized with the internal motivational factors. In an office organization, the most common motivation would be salary but good leaders know that something more profound than money motivates people. For example, why are people looking forward to earning money? Do they have a family to support? Are they saving up to go to school? These motivations are something that a leader can explore when they dialogue personally with the members of their team. People are motivated when they establish very personal goals, aside from the goal that should be achieved in the organization.

Human beings are not static. They thrive in constant challenges and stimulation. People should be given tasks that increasingly get difficult but stay attainable. Their tasks should make them feel proud of themselves for

having conquered challenges, whether they are small or big. Their tasks should be challenging but possible. Make sure to give them constant feedback on their performance to give them a sense of fulfillment and a glimpse of their performance. One of the easiest sources of motivation is praise and recognition. People are more energized to work when their achievements and efforts are given due recognition. However, be careful with recognition. Acknowledge the achievements of one person but don't do it in such a way that will spark envy and unhealthy competition among colleagues.

In relation to challenges, another source of motivation for many people is a task that quenches their thirst for knowledge. People need to be exposed to an environment where their curiosity is satisfied. Make their working environment more interesting to arouse curiosity and encourage learning as well.

A leader needs to constantly figure out what motivates the members of the team, as a group and as individuals. Good leaders don't just bluntly ask their members what motivates them because not all people realize them right away. Rather, good leaders should explore each individual values. This gives you a more personal glimpse on their lives, which will make it easier to dig into to what motivates them.

Allow each member of the team to set his or her own goals, only reminding them once in a while to design their goals according to the collective goal of the organization. This will give them a sense of control over their lives, which is a highly motivational factor for many people. Allowing them to set their own goals will give them a closer look of how their actions will affect their own goals.

You can also use group work or team work as motivational factors. These are effective for people who like to work in groups. This will enhance cooperation and relationships in the team. Also, people are more likely to be motivated when they know that their own actions will affect the welfare of other people. Cooperation will get more things done and strengthen relationships among members.

Good leaders also know how to facilitate a competitive environment to motivate people. This tactic is used in almost any kind of organization. A healthy competition will arouse the productivity of people because winning a competition gives a person a sense of accomplishment. Effective leaders

will learn how to use competition to motivate all the members of the team. As much as possible, leaders should encourage each member to compete against their own performance (even if they are competing with other people). Leaders should also ensure that the competition is worth joining even at the face of defeat. Leaders should be careful not to engage their team in a power struggle where each member becomes manipulative of others just to win a competition.

As mentioned earlier, different people have different motivations. Therefore, you have to cultivate a personal relationship with each employee in order to test different factors that might motivate them. For instance, some people are motivated by competition while others do not work well under pressure. It could be a hit-or-miss process but eventually, you will find each person's motivation. Keep lines of communication open so that you know how each individual responds to motivational factors. Get feedback regularly and see the members of your team are motivated.

It's also important to monitor your members to check if they are exhibiting signs of de-motivation. Clear the office space of any de-motivational factors as much as possible. Keep a healthy relationship between you and your members. You should also make sure that the members sustain harmonious relationships with each other. People are more productive when they have a good relationship with their leaders and their colleagues. Finally, ensure that the collective and individual goals are met.

In conclusion, leadership and empowering people is all about understanding their deepest desires and helping them set goals that are also aligned with the organization's collective goal. It is very important for a leader to assure their members that they belong to an organization where even their personal goals and aspirations are highly valued.

Chapter 3
Emotional
Intelligence in
Leadership



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Leadership cannot take place when the leader does not have sufficient emotional intelligence. A leader with enough emotional intelligence can overcome difficult leadership challenges that not a lot of people can fulfill. Studies conducted in the past several years that people with high emotional intelligence are more adept in addressing organizational conflicts more effectively and quickly. Gone are the days when pure intellect was quickly equated with good leadership potential.

Emotional intelligence is a person's ability to acknowledge and deal with his or her own emotions, as well as the emotions of other people. Emotions can fluctuate due to hormonal changes, stress, and unexpected situations that arise but the right amount of emotional intelligence will help the person deal with emotional changes effectively.

People have different personalities, needs, and preferences. Likewise, people have different ways of dealing with situations and expressing their emotions. It takes sound emotional intelligence to deal with different

personalities. People may feel different emotions at the same time and more often than not, the challenge is to be able to deal with people's different emotions without sparking conflict and straining relationships. When a person has sufficient emotional intelligence, he or she is able to recognize his or her own emotions and how they affect the people around. Emotional intelligence is also the ability of a person to understand how another person feels. Needless to say, emotional intelligence is needed in managing relationships.

In an organization, the people that stay longer usually have a high emotional intelligence. In fact, high emotional intelligence is more preferred than people with high IQ but with low emotional intelligence. People with high emotional intelligence are easy to work with, compared to those with low emotional intelligence. High emotional intelligence enables people to accomplish things by nurturing good relationships. They can sustain level-headedness even in stressful situations. Emotionally intelligent people are not immune to agitation or stress. However, they can easily get a grip of the situation and look for a solution in the calmest manner possible. Therefore, they are bound to make sound decisions because they manage their emotions well in the decision-making process.

Because emotionally intelligent people are level-headed, they don't think too highly or too lowly of themselves. They know their strengths and weaknesses. They utilize their strengths whenever needed but they do not show it off excessively. Likewise, they are humble enough to look at themselves honestly and recognize their weaknesses. Emotionally intelligent people don't succumb to criticism easily. They can take the criticism objectively and use it to enhance their performance.

Emotionally intelligent people are good team players because focus solely on their own success. People with high emotional intelligence look out for the success of the whole group and are willing to modify their own interests and whims for the whole team. They are good empathic listeners with the ability to read people's emotions and feelings. They don't judge right away as well. They try to put themselves in the situation of other people before they come up with a resolution for a conflict in relationships.

The attributes mentioned above make emotionally intelligent people good at managing people and relationships.

Emotional Intelligence and Leadership

Surely, fine abilities and exceptional skills are valuable assets in an organization. It's hard to ignore a person with unabashed brilliance and shining talent. However, the criteria for a good leader go beyond skill and talent. In order to stay in an organization, a person needs a lot of emotional intelligence. This is very true, especially if the person aspires to lead an organization one day. The leader carries a lot of responsibilities that need more than just skill and talent. All the responsibilities attached to leadership can only be carried out well if the leader is equipped with emotional intelligence.

Leadership is a social activity. Leaders need to nurture their emotional intelligence continuously in order to be able to deal with different kinds of personalities in an organization. Emotional intelligence is usually equated with "people skills". Emotional intelligence is not just entirely about people skills, although a lot of emotional intelligence is needed to sharpen one's people skills. Leadership requires forming and maintaining relationships with various personalities. Only a leader with high emotional intelligence can forge solid relationships with his or her team and maintain them. High emotional intelligence will enable a leader to relate with diverse personalities and still motivate each member of the team to meet the organization's goal.

Leadership requires emotional intelligences, especially in times of conflict and pressure. Conflict and problems arise from all sorts of angles. Internal conflict can arise from people in the organization squabbling with each other. To be able to handle such problems, a leader needs emotional intelligence to keep emotions in check. In times of extreme pressure, leaders must be able to avoid explosive outbursts. A good leader should be able to put things in perspective instead of succumbing to emotional outbursts. Handling team of diverse personalities is manageable when a leader has the right amount of emotional intelligence. An empathic leader that is considerate to all the members of the team has enough emotional

intelligence to confront problematic members of the organization without severing relationships. Emotional intelligence on the side of the leader will enable him or her to help the problematic member to express feelings in a healthy way.

Decision-making is another leadership task that requires immense emotional intelligence. There are going to be many factors affecting a leader's decision, including external factors, critics, and unforeseen situations. A leader with emotional intelligence will have enough level-headedness to weigh the pros and cons of any situation before coming up with a decision. Emotionally-adept leaders have enough capacity to make quick and well-thought of decisions. Leaders need to be emotionally intelligent in order to be independent decision-makers, not swayed by unnecessary factors. It takes emotional intelligence to clearly and objectively look at strengths and weaknesses, especially one's own. Leaders need a good glimpse of their assets and weaknesses in order to come up with a decision and eventually follow-through.

Exercising and Enhancing One's Emotional Intelligence for Leadership

Emotional intelligence can be developed and improved over time. One of the first steps to take would be to practice self-awareness in handling stress. Acknowledging the various emotions felt when under pressure and stress will make it easier to address the issue. By being aware of the various emotions running inside a person's head, the person will easily understand the emotions before the emotions rule over their thoughts, words, and actions. Self-awareness is all about recognizing one's feelings and thoughts but to develop it, you can enlist the help of other people. Seek the feedback of the people around you – supervisors, colleagues, etc. It's also important to get the feedback of other people in order to recognize the impact of your emotions and actions on other people. This is important in enhancing the dynamics and relationship of each member. If the leader can practice self-awareness, he or she can set a good example to the entire team.

Part of self-awareness is knowledge of your strengths and weaknesses. You cannot be too humble to downplay your strengths; this is merely false

humility. An emotionally intelligent leader needs to understand that the importance of recognition for efforts without showing off. On the other hand, one cannot be too arrogant with achievements and strengths. A thorough self-evaluation of strengths and weaknesses requires courage and honesty. In relation to self-awareness, you can also start your improving your emotional intelligence by self-reflection. Observe how you react to certain situations, especially the stressful ones. Do you easily burst into a fit? Do you easily snap at your colleagues? These are the things that you need to assess because they are all part of your emotional intelligence.

Improving your emotional intelligence means extending your threshold for stressful situations, whether it be internal conflict in the organization or a big pile of workload. These things really have their way of taking its toll on a person but they're actually things that determine the emotional intelligence of a person. A leader lacking of emotional intelligence will storm away and succumb to these challenges. In the midst of all these challenges, don't just wave your white flag right away. Do not give up on stressful situations without thinking them through. Learn to be aware of your own thoughts when faced with these situations and get a grip of them. Sort out your emotions and distance yourself from them so that you can put things into perspective. Ask yourself, "What can I do and what can't I do?" Look at the problem in terms of the solutions you can provide and let go of the things that have no solutions. Focus your energies on things that can be remedied.

In dealing with problematic colleagues and workers, do not let your emotions lead your decisions and actions. More often than not, a career is usually destroyed because of faulty relationships with co-workers and subordinates. Don't lash out personal tirades against the person. If you have the propensity to blow-up right away, walk away from the problem first and blow off some steam without lashing out at the person. Which part of the problem is the person's fault? Is there anything that could have been done on your part? Are other people involved? Do not focus too much on the person. Instead, address the wrongdoing. When you have put things in perspective, talk to the person but hear out his or her side first. Hear out their viewpoints with no biases, judgments, and stereotypes. Empathy is very important at this point. It is important as a leader especially when you

make decisions concerning your team members involved in the conflict. Even if one of the team members is at fault, it is your job as a leader to ensure that the one at fault will recognize his or her faults without feeling judged. This is a gauge of how much emotional intelligence a leader has.

Chapter 4
Build Successful
Teams &
Relationships



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If you want to build successful relationships with your people, you have to be able to project yourself as more than just a person with authority. People need to respect you, not fear you. In the previous chapter, empathy and emotional intelligence were discussed lengthily. You are going to need to employ these two in order to establish a stable foundation for your relationships with your team members. It also starts with having a good relationship with yourself. This means getting to know yourself, strengths, weaknesses, potential for improvement, and how you react in various situations. Once you familiarize yourself with your personality, dealing with other people's personalities would be manageable.

Also, part of building a successful relationship with your team is to find out what motivates each one of them so that they can be more productive and ultimately find growth and self-fulfillment for themselves.

One of the leader's duties is to make the whole organization constantly productive. Productivity is undoubtedly important in an organization seeking a competitive and successful edge. Productivity relies on individual and team effort, both of which can be addressed by team building. Team building is supposed to produce a group of individuals that work together to execute different tasks. Trust and strong team dynamics are needed in executing these tasks.

What makes a team strong? A solid team must have a common goal. A team can be comprised of members performing different functions but they must always have one overriding goal to be able to call themselves one team. The team members are supposed to do their assigned tasks but they should be dependent up to a certain degree on the other members in order to attain the common goal. They will help each other if necessary to realize common goals. Even if they have individual goals, their individual goals must be aligned to the common goals. Cooperation should be ingrained in each team member at all times.

Team building sessions should establish the team goals, recognize issues that hinder the team from achieving those goals, and come up with ways for the whole team to reach those goals. There are guidelines in setting up team building sessions but how each session is designed still depends on the size and nature of the organization. For example, project-based teams usually change in composition constantly. Given these circumstances, team building activities should focus on the skills of each person that will enable him or her to become an effective team member. In a team where membership is relatively permanent, the focus will shift towards how each team member relates with each other. Relationships of the team members with each other will have a direct impact on their productivity. Thus, the nature of the team should be examined before designing a team building session.

The goal of your team building planning should make each team member realize the gravity of their tasks. Each member should also know why they are participating in the organization. By the end of the team building, they should be reminded of their purpose in the organization.

When planning team building activities, make sure that there are activities that are related to the tasks that the people undertake on a normal basis. It does not have to be a completely technical skill but activities that facilitate team dynamics while employing their skills. For example, marketing executives can participate in a team building activity where they are organized in teams and given a certain amount of money to purchase particular things. They have to make the budget fit without compromising

the quality of their items and the time constraints. In the end, the participants have to realize that they have to think like their customers. Also, working on this activity in groups will encourage productive brainstorming.

Team building activities should also focus on conflict resolution. Although a chapter will be allotted for this, it is worthwhile to discuss conflict resolution in terms of team building. Different kinds of conflicts will plague the team members and threaten their relationship. Each member must be equipped with the necessary skills in handling conflicts in order to secure a harmonious relationship amongst themselves, their leaders, and the people they deal with on a regular basis.

Conflict is not total bane in an organization. It can facilitate the generation of brilliant ideas and strengthening of relationships, as long as the conflict is handled well.

One of the most sensible ways to manage conflict is to improve the communication lines among members of the organization. You may want to divide your team into pairs and let each pair position themselves back to back. One person should be holding a piece of paper and pencil while the other one holds an image of a shape (definite or abstract). The person holding the picture should describe the shape to the person with the pencil and paper, giving out as much details as possible. The pairs are given a time limit. Once the timer goes off, the pairs are supposed to compare their depiction to the original shape. How did the person with the picture describe the shape? Was it described well? Did the person with the paper and pencil draw the image accurately enough? Were there any communication problems? These are the questions that conflict resolution should tackle.

Conflicts usually stem from the lack of trust, a major team spirit killer. If you are conducting a team building seminar in a huge space, you can perform this activity. To do this, scatter obstacle objects (e.g. cones, chairs, boxes, blocks, tables) around the room. Again, assign the team into pairs. As a leader, take note that this activity is geared towards fixing trust issues. So, you may want to group two people who are having a difficult time

trusting each other. Blind fold one person and keep the other person out of the “obstacle area”. Put the blindfolded person in the middle of the area and let the other one give instructions to the blindfolded person on how to get out of that area. The blindfolded person cannot talk or speak under any circumstances. The blindfolded person must avoid the obstacles on his or her way out. Let each pair strategize for a few minutes before beginning, but only on how to communicate during the game. Don’t let them see the area.

Leaders should facilitate solidarity, even outside team building sessions. As a leader, you should be able to identify if there are any barriers that are hindering people from working together as a team. Some teams, especially the big ones, tend to split into small cliques and teams. Leaders should be able to keep track of these things and recognize the cause, whether petty or serious. Sometimes, the cause can be as petty as different dress codes per department. If this is the cause of conflict, there should be one dress code imposed on all the team members.

This phenomenon is very common in large organizations (e.g. the marketing department getting into a conflict with the human resources department, one branch complaining about the head office, etc.). Leaders with managerial positions would be tempted to host a corporate social function in order to eradicate these boundaries but this plan can backfire if not planned properly. For example, in a casual corporate picnic where all employees are invited, they might still seek their friends and resort to cliques. Worse, this can possibly start a fight since all of the employees are in one venue.

If you want to improve the relationships among members or co-workers, you can start by identifying the barriers or the markers that divide the people before gathering them together in a team building session or a social function. List down the specific conflicts amongst the team and work them out with the people involved. For example, cliques in the office could be caused by language and cultural barriers. If this is the case, you can occasionally group people of different races for certain tasks.

Encourage transparency and honesty in different but very highly technical departments too. Sometimes, the rift gets bigger when two diverse groups are assigned to work with each other but one of them uses jargon terms when speaking to non-experts. Discourage this attitude from the employees, especially the technical personnel.

Team members are more likely to have strong relationships with each other if they have a good relationship with their leader. While your team is building relationships, guide and monitor them accordingly. Knowing that they have a leader they can consult and who can understand will make them feel secure and confident in forming relationships with their co-members.

Team building is a continuously ongoing process. Determining its success is not done in one sitting. And, any organization that seeks to stay in top shape should always seek to fortify their teams. This cannot be done by just one team building session. In the end, leaders should remember that team building is a long term process. People usually join an organization with the hopes of staying as long as possible, seeking growth and self-fulfillment. With this in mind, the leader should make it a point to establish team building as a continuous and ongoing process. It is futile to set up a teambuilding process only to return to normal activities as if no teambuilding activities ever took place. As time progresses, team building activities should be modified according to the members' competencies, strengths, and weaknesses. Team building activities should be planned in relation to the fruits of previous team building sessions. There should never be an assumption that successful team building does not stop with one session. Organizational teams and relationships need to be nurtured constantly if they are to remain progressive and stable at the same time.

Chapter 5
Handle Hard
Times & Conflicts
Effectively



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Even the best leaders are bound to encounter obstacles along the way. In fact, the leaders do not have it easy because their position puts them under constant public scrutiny. Every mistake they make is magnified and at times, leaders will feel like they are being pulled in all directions. Mistakes are inevitable because leadership is a learning process. One makes mistakes, learns from them, and rises above them.

It is always good to prepare yourself when you get into something – hobby, career, activity, etc. Leadership is no different. In leadership, there are a few points that you have to remember in order to prepare yourself in facing the pitfalls.

One of the obstacles that leaders should avoid is the lack of focus. Leadership does not mean that you take on all of the tasks or that you are required to know everything. As a leader, it is your job to motivate your team and streamline all activities in order to meet a common goal. It is your job to lead your team to the right direction. Your team will look up to you and rely on you for direction. You can ask them to do some things on their own but it is your duty as a leader to provide them with a direction. It is easy to lose sight of the goal because as a leader, you are going to undertake

a diverse set of tasks. More often than not, it is easy to lose focus in the midst of all these tasks. Leaders should always remember that before executing a task or facilitating an activity, they should make sure that they are aligned towards the common ultimate goal.

The second obstacle is a dangerous one. Many aspiring leaders start out with the promise of serving instead of being served and putting the welfare of others ahead of theirs. But staying up there is difficult in terms of handling power. Power can get a leader drunk. Leaders enjoy privileges and prestige. When you are at the top, you can easily sneak in your own agenda and put it above the whole group's. Leaders should avoid this trap because even if it seems glamorous at first, it will eventually be destructive to the whole organization. When the organization crumbles, it is the leader that usually takes the first blame. Putting yourself first in your priorities is especially tempting during hard times. Corrupt politicians fall into this trap. However, they do not usually enjoy a happy ending. There is a lot of servitude in leadership. Always put your organization and your cause above your personal agenda.

Good leaders have hawk-like eyes when it comes to details. They ensure that all loose ends are tied and the minor kinks are ironed out. This is unquestionably a good trait but if this goes too far, there could be a tendency for the leader to micromanage the smallest and most unnecessary things. As mentioned earlier, leaders are not supposed to do all the tasks for their teams. In fact, there may be some technical things that the leader or manager may not be aware of. Sometimes, a leader has to let some things slide in order to focus on more important things. When leaders focus too much on the unnecessary details, they lose sight of the bigger picture. This will also put them at the risk of losing focus, which brings you back to the first problem. Leaders need to learn what the important things are in order to know what to focus on.

Because leaders are supposed to guide the entire team, there is a notion that leaders are infallible. Sometimes, it gets to the head of some leaders. Whenever they make a mistake or a bad judgment call, they can take personally or refuse to recognize it. Both reactions are not healthy because

in reality, leaders can still make mistakes. Leadership is a learning process. Not everything you initially know will apply to your context. You have to make adjustments to your judgments. Sometimes, you only realize this when you make mistakes. Mistakes should naturally be avoided but once it is there, it has to be acknowledged. Leaders should accept their mistakes in order to learn from them and make better decisions next time.

Leaders will encounter problems that they may not have encountered before. Some of these problems may just be slight variations of the problems that they normally encounter. Others are completely different, something that they may not have immediate solutions to. However new these problems are, leaders should always be ready to adapt to any situation for their organization's survival. Lectures, seminars, and workshops will only get one far. These will not, however, provide you with solutions to every problem. Great leaders have the ability to cope with the unpredictable circumstances that befall them. The ability to embrace change is every leader's essential weapon in steering the organization towards the right direction, even if it loses sight of its path along the way. Leaders need common sense, creativity, and resourcefulness in order to adapt to unpredictable circumstances. Also, part of adapting to changes is to let go of ineffective mindsets. Good leaders rely on the conventional for structure but they also know when to let go of it when it does not work for certain circumstances. Leaders should be critical of old and new mindsets alike to constantly seek better ways of doing things.

Miscommunication is another common problem that leaders will encounter. Even the experienced ones are not spared. New leaders encounter communication problems because they are still familiarizing themselves with their teams. Experienced leaders may still encounter communication problems when they get too complacent and refuse to hear out their team, thinking that they already know how to handle matters. The success of an organization heavily relies on the interaction of its members. Given the changing times and unpredictable circumstances, the surefire way to handle the dynamics of an organization is to keep communication lines open and unbiased as much as possible. Leaders should make it a point to establish to their team that even if that they may not always agree

with all their members, they are still approachable and amenable to communicative dialogues.

A strong and respectable leadership does not mean that challenges and obstacles do not come its way. It simply means that the leader has the right skills to overcome these obstacles. In fact, it is these obstacles that determine whether the leader is deserving of the privileges and responsibilities or not.

Handling Conflicts/ Conflict Management

In managing conflicts, open communication lines are your reliable preventive medicine and remedy. Even before conflicts arise, leaders must already create an environment where everyone is free to express his or her mind in the most appropriate and respectful way. Leaders should encourage healthy discussions during meetings and even in casual conversations. This encompasses all the members of the organization, regardless of age, gender, race, and rank. Even if there are disagreements, respect should not be lost in discussions. Everyone should be encouraged to adjust to each other's differences.

When the conflict is already there, the leaders should take the first step in identifying and understanding the root of the conflict. No harsh judgments should be passed until all sides are heard. The leaders should also emphasize that the goal of understanding the conflict is to resolve it, not to make it big. All parties involved should be encouraged to set their sights towards resolution, not a bigger conflict. Encourage a healthy resolution of conflict to improve and strengthen group dynamics, enhance mutual respect, and get a better perspective of the company's common goals.

In conflict resolution, leaders should be cautious about playing the blame game. They can do this by separating the person from the problem. A person may cause a problem but this does not give anyone (not even the leader) the right to accuse the person of being the problem. Leaders that can separate problems from people will avoid making permanent relationship damages.

Listening is a primary component in conflict resolution. The leader must understand where each side is coming from. They must be given the right to defend their own position without offending the other party. In the process, the leader must facilitate in setting the facts straight. Objectivity is required from the leader as a facilitator. At the same time, he or she must hear out the interests of each side. This will give a better view of why the parties involved are taking such sides.

Once all the sides are voiced out, the leader should consolidate all the information presented and clarify all the facts presented to everyone. No resolution can be formed if not everyone agrees on the facts. Summarize the statements of each side and clarify their sentiments.

Once everyone has agreed on the problem, everyone can brainstorm for possible solutions. Leaders should keep in mind that there are different ways of solving a problem. Most of the time, all parties involved have to compromise to meet halfway. There are times when the other party's stand really has to be rendered unpopular, especially if that stand steps on anyone in any way. There are also solutions that give all the parties what they want without the risk of another conflict. Leaders have their own styles of solving conflicts. There are leaders that try to avoid conflict altogether while there are some that face the problem head-on to put an end to it. Whatever style it is, it must also adjust to the problem at hand.

When the resolution has been negotiated, the leader and the parties involved must come up with ways to prevent the conflict from happening in the future. This should also build stronger relationships among colleagues.

Leaders should not be scared of conflict, as it can present opportunities for reassessing goals and strengthening relationships. As long as the leader is armed with sound conflict management skills, it should not be a harmful source of tension.