

# Leadership Lab (R)

Improvise, Adapt, and Overcome.



If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.

John Quincy Adams

Leaders instill in their people a hope for success and a belief in themselves. Positive leaders empower people to accomplish their goals.

Anonymous

Effective leadership is the only competitive advantage that will endure. That's because leadership has two sides — what a person is (character) and what a person does (competence).

Stephen Covey

## Idea in Brief

Leadership is a complex and complicated subject. And while there are three things that leaders need to do well, often they only do 2 of the 3 things superbly and then fail to achieve the success they desire. It is when leaders focus on creating a culture in which people feel valued, respected and appreciated for the work that they do that the success of the team results.

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## Three Things About Leadership

By B.L. Janke

Leadership is a complex and complicated subject as its fundamentals are rooted in working with people, and we know how varied those are! But there are three things that all leaders need to do well, but most have only historically done the first one or two very well. For far too many leaders have forgotten about the people aspect of their leadership and haven't created the right environment for the people to succeed, let alone the organization. But let's examine the three things of leadership that every leader needs to do well.

The first is to create a compelling vision of the future. This vision of the future must be one that describes what the future could be, not what it is. And this future description must be one that is so full of colour, texture and definition that others can see it too. This task is something that most leaders do reasonably well; they can see the future they are trying to create and see it clearly enough to describe it to others. Business schools and MBA graduates all know how this step works and the importance of being clear about the vision; it is the role of the CEO, of the president and the leader. For without a clear idea of what the

organization is trying to accomplish and where it is trying to go, the organization will undoubtedly wander about in circles of the whims of individuals. The organization will lack a unifying force without a clear goal and line of sight to the future.

The second thing about leadership is that once the vision of the future is clearly described, it is the leader's work to enlist others' support to buy into the vision and be willing to create it as if it was their own. Leadership without followers is simply a person out for a walk. It is the presence of followers that define whether leadership occurs or not, and part of that process is sharing your vision of the future and convincing others that they too want to create the future you describe. This work is hard to do, but many leaders do a pretty good job of this step, although maybe less so than in step 1. This step takes time and energy to convince others that your plan and vision are a good one and that they should make it a reality. You are now asking others to invest their time, energy and resources into making this vision a reality which is why it is so essential that they buy into the future vision and want to create it as



***Deliberate reflection followed by purposeful action is a key to achieving success.***

## LEADERSHIP LAB

Leadership Lab is a forum for the exploration and discovery of personal and leadership excellence. Excellence is a core value of who I am as a person, an educator, and a leader. It is what drives me to perform and to grow; testing the limits of my capability both personally and professionally and pushing them farther.

Excellence is an attitude that one must cultivate and support its growth. To do so, one must study excellence and be committed to life-long learning.

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well. You want to build engagement and enthusiasm for the future in others and not simply a duty or obligation. Your vision should create hope in others and inspire them to make it a reality.

The third thing about leadership is producing the right environment in which people can innovate, create and thrive. And this is the work that many leaders often fail at and fail to provide. This work is the down-and-in work that many leaders tend to ignore or believe isn't their job. But in reality, this is likely the most important work that a leader can do and their most important responsibility. It is also, likely, the most crucial lever that they can pull to achieve the vision they have started with. A leader's role is to create an environment in which everyone in the organization feels valued,

respected and appreciated for the work that they do and where they can do their best work every day. Plain and simple. But also one that is often overlooked, inappropriately prioritized or ignored. But the essence of leadership resides in this third thing, not the first two. Without an emphasis on creating the right environment, leaders are often seen as and are typically rulers, not leaders. For it is in the work of creating the environment in which everyone can succeed that true leadership resides.

A key component of creating the right environment is how people *feel* in the organization and whether they *feel* valued, respected and appreciated for the work that they do. This includes their physical safety but also their psychological safety. And this "feel" bar is set pretty high. It is aligned

with the advice of the Platinum Rule in which you need to treat people the way they want to be treated but also comes with a realization that this expectation can constantly be changing and always varied for each individual. It is the ultimate in situational and servant leadership; to be the leader that each person needs at any point in time. This is why many, and maybe even most, leaders don't practice it. Many leaders would instead highlight the things they do and their actions to demonstrate what they are doing to create a positive environment rather than focus on measuring the impact their actions have on people. If people don't experience the leader's intention that way or feel respected, the activities are virtually meaningless. Instead, leaders must constantly communicate with

their teammates to solicit feedback and gain insight into what they can do to make them feel more appreciated and more valued. And then do these things. This standard is a much higher bar to meet but is also the core of the leadership that is needed today. Treating everyone equally, or the same, is not the goal; it is treating them in a manner that they feel valued, respected and appreciated for the work they do and so they can do their best work every day.

The work of leadership to create this environment is multi-faceted and multi-dimensional as we turn to leading individuals and accommodating their specific needs, wants and desires, in addition to managing a collection or collective of people. It may mean allowing people to celebrate and observe special days for them and their heritage instead of only the predominant religious holidays of the location. It may mean accommodating different needs such as community service or volunteer commitments, time-shift requests, or family obligations and commitments. These will not be the same for everyone and will also change and shift over time with the key to treat people, not equally but equitably, to help them feel valued, respected and appreciated.

As a leader, this effort takes tremendous effort and tremendous courage. It is no longer simply the administration of the corporate policies and procedures but is more broad-based and goal-oriented. The corporate policies of old were

primarily interested in treating people consistently and equally instead of being goal-based to create the right environment and the right culture. Culture improvements, if considered, were often seen as an outcome of these policies as opposed to creating policies with a specific cultural effect in mind. And while there may have been some merit in them at the time, mainly when applied to a nearly homogenous workforce population, they often fail to meet individuals' needs or if the workforce population is more diverse and heterogeneous. Instead, when the policies and programs are focused on the goal or outcome of creating the desired culture of where people are valued, respected and appreciated, the leadership does become harder, as does the administration of the "policies." However, leaders should not be afraid of challenging work or complex situations but courageously wade into them with clarity of the goal and the desired outcome as their guideposts.

The nature of leadership is evolving and maybe at a faster rate than some would like. Current leaders can likely no longer rely upon the behaviours, processes, and activities that got them to where they currently are; often, these behaviours are outdated and inappropriate in today's environment. Instead, leaders will need to adapt to the new realities and learn new behaviours to support the cultural shift that the workforce demands. Some leaders will be able to make this shift effectively, and others will not. Organizations

will need to help leaders shift, but ultimately, some will either not want to adapt and evolve, and some will not be able to, and replacements for these leaders will need to be found. Fundamentally leadership is not about ruling over others who do the bidding determined by the leader, but about creating the right environment for everyone to succeed and where they can do their best work every day.

