

Inspiring Leaders...

inspiring excellence

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Newsletter

The Case for Clarity: A Key Leadership Ingredient

“Effective leaders don’t have to be passionate. They don’t have to be charming. They don’t have to be brilliant... They don’t have to be great speakers. What they must be is clear. Above all else, they must never forget the truth that of all the human universals...our need for clarity is the most likely to engender in us confidence, persistence, resilience, and creativity.” – Marcus Buckingham, *The One Thing You Need to Know: ...About Great Managing, Great Leading, and Sustained Individual Success* (Free Press, 2005)

There’s a lot to be said for clarity and simplicity. When top executives make short, clear statements about their defined customers, core strengths, desired future, and action plans, they prevent employee confusion and anxiety. They generate confidence throughout all levels of the organization and replace uncertainty with resilience and creativity. In fact, the quality of clarity may be the most essential element for leading large groups of diverse employees toward an optimum future.

Warren Bennis, founding chairman of the Leadership Institute at USC’s Marshall School of Business and advisor to four U.S. presidents, once noted that he found more than 800 definitions of leadership. With leadership accounting for 15 percent of an organization’s success, according to Bennis, we need to truly understand its fundamental principles, how to identify those who demonstrate it and how to nurture its traits in potential successors.

- A guiding vision
- Passion
- Integrity (to include self-knowledge, candor and maturity)
- Curiosity
- Caring

In their book *Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence*, coauthors Daniel Goleman, Annie McKee and Richard Boyatzis delineate 19 traits

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Do you have what you need to succeed? A vision for the future and the passion to pursue it? I’m Ellen Bayer and I specialize in delivering corporate and individual executive coaching and development processes that are focused, action and goal-oriented; matching up the values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors that form the foundation of success...and then add the knowledge and skills that you need to reach your personal best.

I founded **Framing Change** to help people like you achieve your potential and be inspired to excellence in your personal and professional lives.

I bring over 30 years of executive experience to my consulting practice sharing the insights garnered from real workplace experience. My academic work lets me bring you the latest from thought leaders in management and business.

As a sought-after speaker and through this newsletter, I reach out to the ‘unfulfilled’ and support their quest for excellence. My passion is to motivate leaders to stretch their thinking; and work to reach their total potential...using sensitivity, professionalism, and a touch of humor.

Stay in touch. Let me know what you want to learn. As they say, let’s talk!

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that effective leaders possess, including:

- Emotional self-control
- Transparency
- Initiative
- Building bonds

And former New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani further narrows the list in his book *Leadership*:

- Know your values
- Be hopeful
- Be prepared
- Show courage
- Build a great team
- Love people

Leadership and management guru Marcus Buckingham, quoted in the introduction to this newsletter, sums it up as follows:

“Great leaders rally people to a better future, by discovering what is universal and capitalizing on it.”

Preoccupation with the future and the ability to communicate one’s vision with clarity drive leadership, he asserts.

This does not mean great leaders are primed to outperform competitors, increase productivity or help others achieve success; rather, they are dissatisfied with the status quo, envision a better future and strive to share it with others to achieve success.

Great leaders clearly appreciate current challenges and believe they have what it takes to conquer them and forge ahead. They remain optimistic and have strong egos, without becoming egomaniacal.

Great Managing Versus Great Leading

Every manager’s starting point is the individual employee. Managers must assess talents, skills, knowledge, experience and goals to design a specific future that fosters each employee’s personal success. No manager can excel without hiring good people, setting clear expectations, recognizing and praising excellence, and demonstrating a sense of caring. As Buckingham puts it:

“Great managers discover what is unique about each person and capitalize on it.”

Leaders begin with an image of the future. They then focus their attention on persuading others that success awaits within this vision.

The One Thing a Great Leader Must Do

Great leaders play a different role from that of managers: They rally people toward a better future.

They are instigators driven to bring people together to realize this future, regardless of individuals’ unique personalities, levels of excitement and initial commitment.

While great managers discover each employee’s unique qualities and capitalize on them, great leaders do the inverse:

“Discover what is universal and capitalize on it.”

Five Basic Fears and Needs

Every leader quickly learns that most people have some basic fear when confronted with uncertainty—and the future is always uncertain. Leaders must consequently find a way to guide people through uncertainty and change.

Anthropologists and other scientists, in fact, have discovered five basic fears that are universal, each of which correlates with a basic need:

FEAR	NEED
Death	Security
Outsiders	Community
The Future	Clarity
Chaos	Authority
Insignificance	Respect

Source: Donald E. Brown, *Human Universals*, 1991

Of all of these universal fears and needs, the most essential one leaders must confront is fear of the future. The modern-day leader is challenged by the unknown. Even with a strong ego and optimism, leaders know they must deal with many complexities and uncertainties. Their success depends on finding a way to engage employees’ fears of the unknown and transforming them into a spirited commitment to a vision for a better future.

Clarity is the tool used to accomplish this. A great leader must define the future in vivid terms and through actions, images and exemplary heroes that allow others to see clearly where they are headed. Clarity is the antidote to anxiety; great leaders use it to increase

Four Points of Clarity

Clarity in leadership applies to four key areas:

1. Whom do we serve? Who are your customers? How can you define them based on what they want and/or need from you?

In order to define your customers with laser-sharp clarity, ask questions like: *“What do you get from us that has real value to you?”*

Compiling information from customers enables you to craft a vivid customer definition—one that helps your employees visualize clients and understand their concerns and values.

2. What is our core strength? By defining your organization’s core strength, you educate your employees about how they will prevail in the future, using their edge to best competitors despite any obstacles.

When a leader instills confidence in core strengths, resilience replaces anxiety about the future.

As Buckingham states: *“The strengths you pick don’t have to reflect current reality. You don’t have to be right. You just have to be clear. It is also essential that your people believe that you believe they can excel in the ways you’ve defined.”*

3. What is our core score? To ensure clarity, avoid measuring several employee behaviors or skills at once. Senior management can track several scores, but leaders must define only the most important core metric for employees to achieve focus.

Make sure the selected behavior falls under employees’ control, as they must have the power to influence their scores.

4. What actions can we take today? *Symbolic action* occurs when a particular goal is achieved to create confidence and success.

Systematic actions include new activities that focus on the needs of customers, highlight core strengths and lead to success on key measurements.

Symbolic and systematic actions serve as behavior plans to success.

Embedding clarity in day-to-day operations requires focus and discipline. While clarity is an innate talent in some people, discipline and practice are required to develop this quality in leaders.

How Do the Best Leaders Achieve Clarity?

Most leaders are skilled at distilling and dissecting complexity to find clarity. How do you refine this talent and increase your capacity to fulfill your leadership roles?

All leaders develop certain disciplines to help them achieve greater clarity. Here are a few suggestions from Buckingham:

1. Take time to reflect. Most great leaders take some time out of their busy schedules for reflection. This time dedicated to thinking is incredibly valuable, allowing high-performing leaders to achieve remarkable success, in spite of complexity.

Some use their travel time for reflection; others utilize exercise or meditative practices. Any chosen method should allow you to sift through the clutter, define essentials and focus on what really matters.

2. Select your heroes with great care. What gets recognized gets repeated. The individuals you recognize and celebrate become role models for others. Look to the people and events that you want others to emulate.

When you recognize a high-achieving performer, be explicit in your recognition by explaining, in precise terms, how he or she served your defined customer, the core strength he/she demonstrated, how he/she met or exceeded your expectations, and the actions he/she took to bring the desired future one step closer.

3. Practice. Discipline yourself to practice using your words, images and stories in a way that helps employees perceive the future with clarity.

The best leaders don’t try to come up with newer and better speeches; rather, they practice and refine their favorite speeches, focusing on the material that is real and pertinent. They aren’t afraid to repeat themselves.

Discipline in refining your descriptions of the future will enable you to lead your people through uncertainty and anxiety toward a clearly defined goal.

A Universal Need for Leadership Clarity

Leaders must never forget the universal need for security that is created through community, clarity, authority and respect. Clarity is the most likely element to engender confidence, persistence, resilience and creativity.

Today's most respected and successful leaders are able to transform fear of the unknown into clear visions of whom to serve, core strengths to leverage and actions to take. They enable us to pierce the veil of complexity and identify the single best vantage point from which to examine our complex roles. Only then can we take clear, decisive action.

The ideas and concepts described in this newsletter are attributed to Marcus Buckingham, author of The One Thing You Need to Know: ...About Great Managing, Great Leading, and Sustained Individual Success. Buckingham is co-author of two best-selling books: First, Break All the Rules: What the World's Greatest Managers Do Differently (coauthored with Curt Coffman) and Now, Discover Your Strengths (coauthored with Donald O. Clifton).

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