

Knowing Others: The More Difficult Aspect of Self-Leadership (Part 2)

We have been considering factors that make leading people difficult. In the previous issue, we understand that people are often driven by values, irritating work habits, unrealistic expectations, ineffectual communication patterns, and self-pity.

Let me complete the list by looking at seven other factors.

1. **People are driven by self-interests – They become grabbing.**

Unfortunately, some people are driven by their own self-interests. They have little concern for their leaders, people and organization. They seek to ingratiate and enrich themselves, often to the detriment of their team and the organization.

It is this selfishness that exhibits self-indulgent behaviors by misusing company time and resources, exploiting company's benefits for their own ends, being uncaring of others, seeking personal glory, backstabbing, turf-guarding, cheating, manipulating and winning for oneself at all costs. Ultimately, self-gratification destroys trust within the ranks.

This is, perhaps, the most difficult aspect in people-management.

2. **People are driven by their prejudices – They become critical.**

People have biases. It is important to know what these biases are. In the field of communication, there are three basic types of biases.

Fundamental Attribution Bias

This is the tendency for us to attribute another person's behavior to internal dispositions but their own behavior to external factors.^{1, 2}

In other words, when we are wrong, we blame the situation.

When others are wrong, we blame the person's character and their negative intentions.

So when we are late, we blame the traffic. But when our colleagues are late, we accuse them of being lazy and ill-disciplined. This is a fundamental bias that all of us share.

False Consensus Bias

This refers to the assumption that our lifestyle, behaviors and attitudes are the yardsticks of normality.³ In other words, we assume people are like us. If we are systematic and organized, we expect others to be likewise. If they don't, we fall right into False Consensus Bias: blame them for having bad work attitude.

Negative Impression Bias

This is another common perceptual bias. People have a tendency to overemphasize negative information about other individuals^{4, 5}. The principle of negativity is ubiquitous: negative information is perceived to carry greater weight than positive information.

We tend to focus on a person's negative characteristic and use that perception to judge subsequent behaviors.

If I were to ask you what you remember about someone when I make the following statement about him, “He is hardworking, creative and insightful but uncooperative”, you would immediately focus on ‘uncooperative’. This is our most natural response.

When we have this bias, we adopt a “blaming & self-justifying” approach. We can become very intransigent in our positions and use that perception to judge subsequent behaviors. We start noticing and focusing on the other person’s uncooperative behavior and eventually, our perception becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

3. People are driven by emotional hang-ups – They become irrational.

Some individuals have little control over their emotions. They become unduly sensitive, irascible, petulant, and angry. Small things upset them. They give in to sudden outbursts when provoked. They are suspicious of people when they are challenged. They scowl when others disagree with them.

Their lack of emotional self-control makes them difficult team people. They have to be pacified constantly. Sometimes, they intimidate others more by their unreasonable behavior than their professional competence.

This is another group of hard-to-manage people.

4. People are driven by stressful, over-demanding work pressures – They become panicky.

Some people are only able to perform a single-task at a time. As one of my good friends, Dr Stephen Phua, Senior VP of IMS Health Asia-Pacific, likes to say, “Different horses for different courses.” Not everyone can compete well in this turbo-charged environment.

They find it difficult to perform under pressure of time, constraint of resources and during severe crisis. This problem is exacerbated by their incompetence.

5. People are driven by their own incompetence – They become unproductive.

The truth in work life is that some people are simply not competent or not as competent as we want them to be. This can be both frustrating and discouraging for the leader in today’s highly pressurized environment.

6. People are driven by incompatible interests/needs – They become challenging.

We distinguish between position and interest. Position is a seemingly intractable stand that a person takes e.g. “I want more pay!” The staff who makes this demand can be driven by many different interests or needs. It might be a concern for justice because the boss had previously by passed him/her. Or it might be driven by a need for support because s/he had been given more work and wanted an additional staff.

Very often, conflict arises because of seemingly incompatible interests between two parties. The problem with interests is that they are hidden and leaders have a hard time uncovering these underlying interests.

7. People are driven by their own vanities – They become distracted.

People have their personal vanities – some love fanciful cars, owning a house in a prime district, others enjoy first-class travels, collect *avant garde* watches, designer clothings, etc., Their inordinate desire for these tangibles can be a hindrance and may trip them up in their work.

Their focus on these tangibles sometimes make them foolishly intoxicated. They forget that tangibles have diminishing returns: The more things they have, the less satisfied they will become and the more addicted they will be to their possessions.

As we conclude, I have found that most people are driven by more than one factor and different people in different situations are driven by different factors. Hence, the wise leader is cognizant of these varying factors and work towards managing them to get the best out of their employees.

Therefore, it is imperative that leaders engage their employees continuously. "Any company trying to compete must figure out a way to engage the mind of every employee," Jack Welch of GE once said.

Much of a company's value lies "between the ears of its employees." If the company is bleeding talent, it's bleeding value. Unfortunately, many senior executives are busy traveling the world, signing new deals and developing a vision for the company, that they have little idea of what is going on at the home office.

Unless we understand human behaviors and their motivations, we will not be able to lead people effectively.

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Managing Self is one of the most difficult aspects in self-leadership. What are the areas that need self-management? Read ***Self-Management - The Control Leaders Need***

Knowing yourself is an important aspect of self-leadership. Learn about what you need to know about yourself in ***Self-Awareness - The First Step in Self-Leadership***

¹ Jones, E.E. & Nisbett, R.E. (1972). "Actor and the observer: Divergent perceptions of the causes of behavior." In E.E. Jones, D.E. Kanouse, H.H. Kelley, R.E. Nisbett, S. Valins, & B. Weiner (eds.), Attribution: Perceiving the causes of behavior. Morristown, NJ: General Learning Press, 1972.

² Hamacheck, D.E. (1982). Encounter with Others: Interpersonal Relationship and You. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982.

³ Hamacheck, D.E. (1982). Encounter with Others: Interpersonal Relationship and You. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982.

⁴ Kanouse, D.E., & Hanson, L.R. (1972). "Negativity in evaluations." In E. E. Jones, D.E. Kanouse, H. H. Kelley, R. E. Nisbett, S. Valins, & B. Weiner (eds.), Attribution: Perceiving the causes of behavior. Morristown, NJ: General Learning Press, 1972.

⁵ Hamacheck, D.E. (1982). Encounter with Others: Interpersonal Relationship and You. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982.