

THE MODERN WORLD'S LEADERSHIP DILEMMA

Nobody has a monopoly on enlightenment – this is a tested piece of wisdom. However, it is becoming very apparent in Western democracies that the exercise of leadership at all levels of society is becoming more difficult, yet without it societies go nowhere.

In past generations, leaders occasionally took “the pulse” of those they led and then simply got on with what they believed people supported and wanted.

This process occurred with little or no real consultation with the governed. What has changed quite dramatically, over the last generation, is that citizens have become more highly educated; the media have become pervasive in peoples' lives and as a result it is becoming more difficult for leaders to get things done and at the same time, to take people with them.

There is not a leader in any part of the world who is not subjected to a range of opinion makers, often self appointed, who have no responsibility for anything except themselves. Yet many of these individuals take it upon themselves to be highly critical of leaders without surfacing helpful ideas which could improve what leaders propose.

Positive critics are a valuable part of a healthy democracy, since they demonstrate how something proposed can be improved or maybe abandoned for a better solution. Such positive critics are more productive than people who are carping, negative and destructive.

Leaders of any organization can easily fall into the trap of believing that their position and power put them above those they lead. The adage that power corrupts absolutely is a reflection on the human condition. Hence the requirement for monitoring structures with checks and balances to keep leaders honest and focused.

However, if the world is going to be a better place, and there is no reason not to believe this is possible, leaders ultimately have to be purveyors of hope, optimism and enthusiasm. If they have these qualities, they will take their fellow citizens with them, as they seek to implement their vision for making the world a better place.

The contemporary experience of today's leaders is teaching us that leadership is not so much a position as a way of doing things. People do want to be consulted, and want to work collaboratively, with leaders, if at all possible.

To be successful, leaders have to be able to show there are better ways of doing things and then seek to convince those they work with that they are optimistic, honest and have the skills, expertise and flair to deliver on their proposals. For this to happen, boldness, courage and an ability to weather storms are vital ingredients.

Leaders have a job to do and have to be able to convince those around them that their directions are in fact good for the majority of people they serve.

The negativities and ambiguity which face leaders can be overcome when they succeed in providing inspiration, and when they uplift people's spirits, demonstrate genuine human values and seek to convince people that they are able to make their lives more fulfilling and happy.

Leaders cannot back away from reminding people that life is not fair, and that not everything that seems desirable is possible to achieve. Yet at the same time, being a champion of hope is probably the best gift they can give to those they lead. Humanity's health requires this.

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