



Effective Leadership

There are close to 7 billion people on the planet with different stories, different histories, and different futures, some of these people are and will become our leaders. What is it that makes a person a visionary, an inspirer, a world changer? That is the question that Warren G. Bennis and Robert J. Thomas seek to answer in their book *Geeks & Geezers*. Upon interviewing numerous leaders from two distinct eras, they found the common thread: The Crucible. An event that forges someone into the leader he or she is to become. The crucible model illustrates how an individual develops into a leader and takes into account their era along with their individual factors. During the life changing event, the experience and meaning placed on it by the individual is what forges them with a sense of purpose and passion. Many of us can illustrate a time in our lives when we were tested or had that “aha” moment, but not all of us emerge from these experiences as leaders; many emerge battered and broken. The crucible model shows the crucial elements of leadership qualities, in addition, one could surmise that effective leaders have a strong vision and passion for making the world a better place.

Throughout time, we have wondered what makes a person a leader. In many ancient tribal communities the leaders were from a blood line of previous leaders and most of the time, that first born son or daughter was also a born leader. Many of the nations of the world believe that cultivating leadership through education is a way to ensure the survival of their culture. In ancient China, their philosophy was that “individuals must improve themselves before society

can improve” (DeCicco, 2003). The Chinese were aware of the value of an education and had a system in place where boys could learn to read along with battle technique. In today’s world anyone can become a leader regardless of their blood line. Many schools teach leadership skills to ensure the cultivation of future leaders. The question of what makes a leader is at the core of leadership education and it is that question that motivates many to find the key to creating effective leaders in future generations.

What are the qualities that make a leader? This question is at the core of the research that I have undertaken for this essay. As I read through articles that discussed leadership traits, I found I was reading many of the concepts similar to those found in *Geeks & Geezers*; that leaders are not just born but are formed through their ability to adapt, communicate their vision, and their integrity. Surfing the internet, I was able to discover many items on leadership development. There are a couple TED talks that I found very enlightening on the subject. The TED Talk with Simon Sinek centered on his concept of the Golden Circle: "a simple but powerful model for inspirational leadership all starting with a golden circle and the question "Why?" (TED). Another fascinating talk was with Arianna Huffington who emphasizes the importance of getting enough sleep in order to be a successful leader.

Passion is often the driving force behind a leader; having a strong desire to change something is frequently the motivation behind a passionate response. Many famous leaders followed their passion and were not always well received. Abraham Lincoln was passionate about ending slavery, yet faced a lot of opposition from the citizens of the Southern United States. More recently, President Barack Obama’s passion to fix health care in America has created a huge debate even to the point of calling him a Socialist. A passionate leader is a leader who will stop at nothing to improve their life and the lives of those they touch. President Obama

also had a certainty about health care; many presidents before him attempted to improve the health care system in the United States only to be brought down by huge opposition. With his passion to change the current state of health care, President Obama was able to pass his initiative and enjoy the subsequent success. Without passion a leader will lack drive and purpose, it is certainly an essential element to a successful leader. Nelson Mandela, who had a crucible experience beyond comprehension, is clearly a leader with strong passion. His desire to end Apartheid and create equality for the “colored” people of South Africa was the driving force behind his success as a leader. Mandela has said, “Leadership is like herding cattle; you lead from the back. Observe what the herd is doing and guide them in the right direction” (Ignatius). His obvious humble nature and his ability to appeal to people’s hearts, not their heads, has made him one of the great leaders of our time. On a smaller scale, leaders within businesses and communities must continue to be inspired by their passion for change in order to successfully lead.

The ability to inspire and create a shared vision is vital to a successful leader. Closely related to passion, vision is the ability to see the desired future and share that desire with others. Nelson Mandela knew that he had to appeal to the hearts of South Africans in order to create change. The inspired leaders of corporations and communities must also appeal to the hearts of those they wish to inspire to follow their vision. Successful leaders are aware that they must communicate their vision from the inside out, starting with “why” and ending with “what.” Simon Sinek who developed a concept called the “Golden Circle” (appendix A), shows how leaders are inspiring their followers by communicating directly with their feelings and are tapping into their “gut” instincts. The example Sinek uses is the Apple Computer Company; they are extremely successful because they promote their vision of challenging the status quo and

doing things differently; which resonates deeply with those do not want to identify with the status quo. Whereas most companies will communicate from the outside in, promoting “what” they are selling (i.e. fast computers, modern design, etc.) This type of vision does not inspire anyone to identify with their company. Apple computer sees record sales year after year because they have a strong vision and consumers of their products are inspired to share in that vision. In *Geeks and Geezers*, one of the leadership competencies illustrated in the crucible development model, is “engaging others by creating shared meaning.” Appealing to people’s sense of individuality and making them feel that they are part of something special allows a leader to move his or her followers toward that shared vision.

Though there are many factors to leadership and many studies done on the concept of leadership, I can honestly state that a leader must have a clear vision and sense of passion in order to inspire others to follow. A leader must be open to change and understand that uncertainty holds its own power. Being open to change and learning from those who are following you will create an experience of mutual acceptance and respect. Upon reading many articles and books on leadership, I have learned that it is not necessarily the smartest people that are the best leaders, but rather those that surround themselves with smart people and listen to them are indeed the best leaders. So many times, in politics especially, we see leaders who are only in it for their ego. These are the leaders that ultimately fail and create dissention among their followers. Unfortunately, these types of leaders can be found in many communities. I recently spoke to a friend of mine who has been involved in his running club for many years. He lamented about how unhappy he is now and how he no longer looks forward to participating in the running club because the current president of the club is a power hungry control freak who won’t let anyone do their job without her input. This clearly illustrated to me how destructive

and ineffective leader can be. She may have a passion and vision for her running club but she is lacking in the ability to inspire and empower the members of her club.

Appendix A

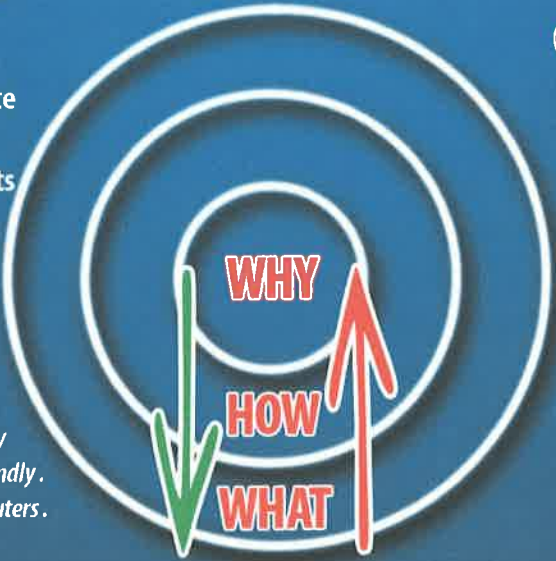
HOW TO INSPIRE OTHERS?
SIMON SINEK'S GOLDEN CIRCLE

INSPIRING LEADERS
Inspiring Leaders Communicate Starting With Their Mission and Ending With Their Products

OTHERS
Others Communicate Starting With Their Products and Never Get To Their Mission

Their Message:
"Everything we do, we believe in challenging the status quo and thinking differently. The way we challenge the status quo is by making our products beautifully designed, simple to use and user friendly. We just happen to make great computers. Want to buy one?"

Their Message:
"Those are our products and services, are the best on market and are made with great care. Want to buy one?"



The diagram consists of three concentric white circles on a dark blue background. The innermost circle is labeled 'WHY' in red, the middle circle is labeled 'HOW' in red, and the outermost circle is labeled 'WHAT' in red. A green arrow points downwards from the 'WHY' circle to the 'WHAT' circle, and a red arrow points upwards from the 'WHAT' circle to the 'WHY' circle.

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