

Servant Leadership: A Paradigm Shift in leadership in Wisdom Age

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Abstract

The most important transformations in civilization have been brought by the great leaders. In industrial era, the situation needed control and management of people. Crossing the information age, in this wisdom age the whole scenario has changed with the shift in the mind set, as previous modes of leadership is not yielding the desired results. Enabling and empowering people have replaced controlling and managing them giving better results thus bringing a paradigm shift in leadership style. Creating trust and aligning the vision to the needs of body, mind, heart and spirit can help unleash the optimum in people. This conceptual paper is an effort to highlight the new abilities needed in a leader with the changing times. It discusses in detail, the ways to develop the synergy in body, mind, heart and spirit to make the decisions that get direction from wisdom. Examples have been cited where such abilities have created remarkable leaders. The importance of such ability for nation building is brought to focus by stating the consequences of adapting it.

KEYWORDS: Servant leadership, trust, empowerment, moral authority, synergy in body, mind, heart and spirit.

INTRODUCTION

Significant changes generally begin with people who have found their voice and then have inspired others to find theirs as leaders. People around the globe have been found entering a 'post-materialistic' world in which they are more concerned with issues of quality of life and subjective well-being than the economic prosperity. Being successful has become less important than having a thriving and meaningful life (Diener, Lucas and Oishi, 2002). In this post materialistic times most of the people after gaining expertise in their field and proving their efficiency in handling various aspects of life are still feeling a vacuum in life despite wealth, health and technological facilities growing at an unprecedented rate. Irrespective of all gains in culture, most people experience a reinforced sense of helplessness, isolation and stress. Victor Frankl in late nineteen fifties stated that 25 percent European students show an 'existential vacuum', more or less a marked degree of a sense of pervasive boredom in life and it was found in 60 percent of American Students. Covey (2006) quotes the finding of Harris interactive poll of 23000 U.S. residents, which stated that only 35percent people had a clear understanding of what they are trying to achieve and why. One out of five was enthusiastic about his goal and only 13 percent had high trust and cooperation in relationships with others.

LEADERSHIP DISEMPOWERING PEOPLE

Man seems being disempowered and this is being caused because the industrial age gave importance to machines, capital, things and required human beings

to comply with strict procedures to fulfil the ever-growing expectations. This also gave a belief that people like things need to be controlled and managed. Increased dominance of objectivism saw human beings as a collection of body parts, a well-oiled genetic machine and their behaviour modifiable through conditioning and training. This type of treatment doesn't identify and nurture the true human potential, creating co-dependent relations of disempowerment. Human beings begin lacking the initiative to act independently and take responsibility. Confirming rigidity killed the spontaneous creativity innate in a person and brings fear of failure accompanied with dullness in life. There is trust less-ness in relationships.

A PARADIGM SHIFT

Now as the current scenario demands people to be thinking differently, there is a change in the way the people need to be led or motivated bringing a paradigm shift in the leadership style. Each person has a deep innate yearning to find his own inner voice as each individual is unique combination of talent, passion, need and conscience. With the material progress people have mastered their talent, passion and have been able to fulfil many physical and psychological needs but with changing times the expertise and efficiency are no longer optional but have become an entry price. What the civilization is looking forward to is thriving and contributing individuals. For this the leadership, be it at any organisation level say family, community, social group, corporate, institutional or political has to undergo a major change in the form of total paradigm shift.

NEW ABILITIES NEEDED

One who can lead others has to first master himself in respect of his mental vision, his physical discipline, his emotional passion and his spiritual conscience. Great leaders have a vision in terms of a new future, a will power to work hard, persistently to achieve the imagined, a fire of passion that fuels their action and a moral conscience that works as a guidance system to make the best principled use of vision, discipline and passion. Thus, leadership has a challenge to function each organisation in a way that it enables each person to see his worth and potential for contribution to accomplish the purpose. Leadership is communicating to people their worth and potential so clearly that they come to see it in themselves. Hence leaders need to understand that things, costs, processes, resources, infrastructure etc. are to be managed but people are to be led and not managed. The influence of a person increases many folds when he rises above from being a mere manager to a leader.

Identifying chronic challenges / problems of misalignment, low trust, apathy, and victimisation, the solution no longer lies in making rules, increasing control and demanding greater efficiency. Dealing with challenges, the shift in leadership demands it to be the one that aligns, empowers, guides and models a trustworthy character. A leader needs to be like a constant light house that builds trust and increases his inner voice helping others identify theirs. To do this he has to move up the ladder of initiative and delegate to build trust with people and empower them. Only a trustworthy and credible leader can exercise his moral authority. Trust is the glue that holds the teams and thus the relationships together. One merits trust by working with integrity and maturity, where life is seen as a vast pool of opportunities and resources and not as a mere narrow selfish competition.

Thus, whole paradigm needs change to base the functioning on wisdom and change begins when humility with courage creates integrity and this integrity in turn creates trust. The wisdom occurs when this trust intersects with competence, to think strategically, to have the necessary knowledge and understand that the whole is affected by each part. This wisdom creates servant leadership- that is service above self, where leaders have a moral authority by serving others and thus attain a formal authority. Retrospectively looking back to find such leaders and their miraculous influence on people we find a few examples.

M. K. Gandhi played an important role in pre-independent India, though he held no formal position from which he could lead people. His moral influence created such norms in society that it finally shaped the political will. Nelson Mandela committed his life to fight against apartheid-a policy of discrimination between black and white South Africans, which restricted the black to exercise the fundamental right to vote. Mandela was so impelled by his imagination and conviction that he could visualize a world far from his restricted confined experience in prison for 26 years. In 1993, he won the Nobel peace prize for his work to end apartheid. Thus, we see that the decision based on the foundation of moral authority and trust is best alternative. Thinking win - win situation is very apt in cementing the trust. Being loyal to those not present, giving and receiving feedback, small kindness and courtesies, apologising, listening empathetically are most important tools of building trust. A team that trust their leader more easily identifies with the path found by the leader to be the correct one. Otherwise diverse personalities, agendas, egos, and trust levels make this acceptance a very tough task. Gandhi and Mandela led huge masses on the basis of this moral authority and trust.

To unleash the power of the people being led, the leadership vision and mission must identify the members as individuals with power to make a choice and not just responding creatures. When these choices/decisions of individuals gain in an integrated way from talent, logic, reason, or in other words conscious- ego related to Rational Intelligence, the behaviour gets the quality of expertise. When their choices / decisions gain in an integrated way from passion, feelings or in other words subconscious and unconscious related to Emotional Intelligence, the behaviour gets the quality of effectiveness. But, when the choices / decisions gain from the balancing factor, the conscience - the behaviour gets greatness. It gives magnanimity to behaviour and life by assigning higher meaning and value to it in a wider and global context. It recruits Rational and Emotional dimensions into a superior combination (Zohar and Marshall, 2000). The above examples of super functioning in individuals had their vision, discipline and passion guided by their conscience. They integrated, transcended the ego and emotion and thus, transformed the society.

When the choices / decisions are based only upon Rational or Emotional Thinking or combination of both, it doesn't help utilize the true human potential to its' maximum. Total non-connectivity to the conscience leads to malfunctioning, and as the degree of connectivity increases, it makes the behaviour balanced and takes it successively to super functioning with gradually increasing connectivity to the conscience. Therefore, empowering people to connect to their conscience by aligning them with their spirit would help them make right choices and that is really important, as today people and not the products are referred to as wealth. A successful leader needs to inspire trust without expecting it, create order without demanding it, and

empower people without proclaiming, un-leash the potential of people without any external motivation.

CONCLUSION

Leaders whose functioning is centred from their conscience, where body, mind, heart are coordinated, they reach to self mastery. Whereas those who are functioning their lives centred on logic and passion are working from a narrowed space not giving optimum of them. Increasing internal coherence leads to more efficiency, greater creativity, flexibility and adaptability in all systems. This internal coherence may be achieved by coordinating physical, mental, emotional and spiritual energies.

At physical level a leader needs wise control over appetite, stress management and physical exercise. When the body is subordinated to mind and spirit, the discipline and self mastery flows in. The advantages of this physical mastery are mental and spiritual rather than being only physical and this physical self-mastery is fundamental to reach other levels. For mastering the mental energies, one needs to get involved in continuous learning that emerges from applying the knowledge to self, to internalise the knowledge, as just to know and not to do is really like not knowing. A sincere effort of gaining self awareness through feedback on life's involvement nurtures mental mastery. Emotional mastery needs again emotional awareness, personal motivation, self-regulation, empathy and social skills. Emotional awareness gives the knowledge of space that one has got to react from in face of a situation. Self regulation disciplines the reaction and empathy empowers to reach to the hearts of others and influences them before the reaction reaches them. Synergising by win-win alternatives builds mutual respect and thus develops social skills.

Lastly, the most vital energy is the spiritual energy and for mastering this energy a leader needs to have integrity, sense of contribution and finding own voice by aligning the talent and passion. When the choices people make emerge from coherent inner self where physical, mental, emotional and spiritual energies give in to the decisions, the wisdom for servant leadership flows in. In absence of which the ability of human being is diminished in a major way as the freedom of choice narrows down to minimal. The synergy of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual functioning not only widens the space for behaviour to emerge but gives magnanimity to the human behaviour that is specific to this very species. Hence its apparent that shift to servant leadership is vital to nation building in the wisdom age.

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