

SMART Leaders: Effective Leaders of the 21st Century

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Abstract

Leader and leadership are not the same, but related. Leaders might come with position appointed or naturally beings. However, leadership is of anyone who wants to lead. You do not need a position to lead. This notion is even more true in the 21st century because changes are more rapid and unpredictable, we need more leaders to lead us through the difficulty of the new ages, but only a few positions are available to be filled. So the true leader just leads for the sake of better result. And since the challenges of the future is more than you could imagine, more people but less resources, new problems of no clues of solution, and timing cure is needed. All of these force us to look for SMART leaders. This is the purpose of this article.

Introduction

From time to time our world has been saved by great leaders, but also destroyed by some. Leaders are someone who could lead other people in either good or bad destinations. Of course, we all need good leaders for the better future

of our world, but no one could guarantee of that because there are many kinds of followers as similar as of leaders. However, they types of leaders we badly need are good and effective leaders.

Leaders could not be leaders unless there are some or a lot of followers. All leaders prefer a kind of leading that people want to follow. The more productive leading is becoming a leader that people want to follow (Miller2013) and the best is follow without any condition. We all know well that to be a good leader, like what Miller pointed out, is not an easy task. French and Raven (<http://en.Wikipedia.org> 2014), long ago, suggested five bases of power that made people follow, namely, coercive power, reward power, legitimate power, referent power, and expert power. Later (1965) they added the sixth base, informational power, to the model.

Six bases of power that leaders might have and use to lead people, but in the modern world like today, leaders need more leading skills and characters to become a good leader. In addition to your leading skills and characters, leaders need to know

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your present situation, challenges, and your followers. For good or bad leaders, it is the matter of value, consisted of belief and something you consider important by your judgment. So some deeds we consider as bad leading, while other adore them. Although good or bad is the matter of value, good leading behaviors should be congruent to what values are adopted by majority of world citizens. And good leaders should be able to differentiate good from bad ones. Or else, our world is subjected to danger.

Some Notable Leadership Concepts

Leadership is one of the most attractive subjects has been interested and studies long and nowadays, but the least understood among many. Studies of leadership starts off with trait theory, believing that certain traits that a leader processes will make him be a leader. But it turns out wrong because some other people might have the same trait, but not all are leaders. People follower leaders maybe because they are fear of something, or they really believe in the same goals, or just do not know what to do, so follow others.

Some great leaders proposed their beliefs of how to lead others. Fiedler (1967) proposed Contingency Leadership, Hersey and Blanchard (1988) Situational Leadership, Blake and Mouton's Leadership Grid Theory (cited in Hughes, Ginnett, and Curphy (2002). Those , who proposed situational leadership, believed leaders

lead according to certain situations. And of course, followers follow according to certain situation as well. Ohio State University's model of Behavioral Leadership or University of Michigan leadership model is another choice of looking at leadership (cited in Bratton, Grint, and Nelson 2005), but all of these and more might not meet the challenge of the 21st century because situations and problems of the next century are much more than we could imagine. That is why I mention above that our world needs good and effective leaders, no matter or not these people are in any kinds of positions or not. But what we need now is someone volunteer to lead us to better place for us all to live in.

New trend on leadership focuses more actual means and techniques which provide how leaders and followers actually do to achieve goals as organizations or groups. Some recent development of leadership concepts are transformational leadership (Brass and Availo 1994), Servant Leadership (Autry 2002), and Creative Leadership (Puccio, Murdock, and Mance 2007) for examples.

Our World in the Next Fifty Years

If you want to be in the game, you should know the game well. It is equally true if you want to be a good leader in the 21st century, you should, at least, know what the world of at least the next fifty years from now would be like. I am neither a fortune teller nor a future forecast scientist. What I would like to share

with you in the next few paragraphs is based on a book by Laurence C Smith (Smith 2011). Eight issues are main points presented in the book, the four rules and the four global forces.

The four rules set by Smith were like assumptions for the use of a thought experiment he proposed to all of us to think about our world in the next forty years or so. In term of thought experiment, Smith means an intellectual exercise of mind on some critical issues worth enough to think about. The four rules to mention next would be his assumptions as ground facts for the experiment to be implemented. The first rule is “No Silver Bullets”. Let us assume that in the next 40 years, there will not be any easy ways or instant discovered innovation to cure the crisis we are facing now and in the future, such as diesel-growing fungus that could be used to produce fuel, or God-like genetic engineering to grow rice without water. However, there might be some breakthrough, but might be a rare one.

The second rule is that there would be “Now World War III”. This assumption is based on the lessons learned from World War I and World War II that left much suffer to us. And we have learned how to deal with conflict among us better now. However, discrete wars, local conflict and limited destroy among human groups could be common. But big wipe out, like the two world wars, might not happen. This means that the world population would grow steadily.

Rule number three “No Hidden Genies”. Some unpredicted and unexpected occurrences might appear from time to time along with civilization development, such as great depression, unstoppable killer disease pandemic, and so on. Something like these could occur anytime without warning in spite of study and observation. However, some cautions have been under investigation such as climate changes, ice sheet changes, blue oil or water scarcity. But it is never certain that these problems would not occur.

Rule number four, “The Models Are Good Enough”. Smith proposed that his thought experiment presented in his book assumed that problem solving models applied at present are workable. Some conclusions reached in his book applied computer models of complex phenomena, such as climate and economies. However, every model has its flaws and limitations. But for the purpose of this thought experiment, Smith was satisfied with the available models.

Now let us turn to the four global forces that would affect our world in the next forty years. The first force is demography, meaning the ups, downs, and movements of different population groups within human races. Demographic is determined by factors like birth rates, income, age structure, ethnicity, and migration flows. Even one factor alone, birth rates, is powerful enough causing problems in our world. Smith pointed out that it took about 12,000 years to reach

our first billion human habitants on earth, but only 130 years for our second billion, and 30 years for the third, 15 years for the fourth. Luckily, the duration of the fifth, sixth, and seventh billion is average of twelve years. But unfortunately, earth surface is not expanded, a lot of resources have been consumed, food production is limited. Now you do not have to use much intelligent to figure what our world would be like in the future.

The second global force is the growing demand that human desires place upon the natural resources, services, and gene pool of our planet. As mentioned above that the increase of population results more paces, resources, foods, and services are needed. New ways of food productions and replaced resources are invented. Initial problems might be solved, but it leads to new problems. It circles problems and adds more new ones.

The third global force is globalization. There are many definitions of the term. In general, the term does not only refer to increasingly international trade and capital flows, but also has political, cultural, and ideological dimensions. Based on this concept, we could experience the effects of globalization in many ways. A financial crisis strikes the other side of the world, it consequently affects all other places around and even those on the other side of the world, too.

The fourth global force is climate change. This force is obvious that everyone experiences it everyday.

Greenhouse effects, rising and falling temperature unexpectedly, too much rain or drought, ice berg melt, and so on are normal issues of the world today. Problems related to climate change increase and we never know what it would be like in the next forty years.

These are proposed global forces that would change our lives in the 21st century. We, as the world citizens should not sit still, but cooperate to seek ways out. If it happens that you do not care of what I have presented above, please just do not add more problems to the situation. Thanks for that since I see it as “help”. And what we need now are “smart, care, and dare leaders” to lead us out.

The 21st Century Skills

Although I add the 21st century skills on my article, it does not mean these skills would solve the problems raised above. But suggested skills by experienced writers could trigger choices to help us survive. Recently, a few writers proposed skills needed to survive in the 21st century, but the following skills were based on the book named 21st Century Skills: Learning for Life in Our Times, by Trilling and Fadel (2009).

Trilling and Fadel proposed three groups of skills for the 21st century, learning and innovation skills, digital literacy skills, and career and life skills. Learning and innovation skills include (1) critical thinking and problem solving, (2) communications and collaboration, and (3) creativity and

innovation. Digital skills are (1) information literacy, (2) media literacy, and information and communication technologies. And career and life skills consist of (1) flexibility and adaptability, (2) initiative and self-direction, (3) social and cross-cultural interaction, (4) productivity and accountability, and (5) leadership and responsibility.

According to skills mentioned above, it could be concluded that although learning is still crucial to life, but it is not enough. In addition to that, one should be able to use what we learn to create new services or products. Communication is a core task of understanding, but not enough. Collaboration is essential and effective goal of communication. Life in the 21st century is an digital era and digital skills are necessary skills for ones to survive. The more you could make use of digital devices and software, the better opportunities would open to you. Finally, career and life skills are “final answers”. How you could cope with you career is as much as important to how you live your life. The balance of both are the life of the 21st century. This is true for both ordinary people and leaders.

Now let us turn to the new trend of leadership of the next century.

Servant VS Heart of Leadership

Miller (2013) pointed out in his book “The Heart of Leadership” and Autry (2001) in his book “The Servant Leader” shared the same concepts distinguishing a manager from a leader. A manager needs

managing and learning skills to get the job done while a leader acts upon his characters of self, heart, and soul while leading.

A leader, at present and in the future, is not a leading boss, but someone who serves and helps other to achieve. Autry proposes five ways to become a servant leader, namely, Be Authentic, Be Vulnerable, Accepting, Present, and Useful. Firstly, to be authentic is to be who you are. Be the same person, hold the same value, behave the same standard of every role. In short, be your real self. Secondly, to be vulnerable is to be honest with your feeling, be open with your doubts and fears towards your ideas, your employee’s performance and that of yours. Be able to admit mistakes and promptly be able to say you are sorry. Being vulnerable needs much courage and spirit.

Thirdly, the other character of the servant leader is to be accepting. Autry (2001: 16) said “acceptance is more important than approval”. Acceptance needs no approval, but just accept “that” as it is. However, this does not mean your accept everything without out critical analysis. But it means you accept every idea or suggestion for consideration, discussion, evaluation, and judgment. Many excellent ideas have been turned down without accepting for further analysis. When we are discussing, criticizing the ideas, we do it towards the “ideas”, not the person who proposes the ideas. Fourthly, to be present, which is another

character of servant leaders, means to pay attention to what you are doing at the moment and do it best. In contrast to this proposal, we learn from the past and always plan for the future, but while you carry out the mission, you should commit yourself at present.

Finally, the last character of servant leaders is “being useful”. Being useful is to be helpful and to serve others. Good leaders make sure that people get resources they need to do their jobs. Be available when they need help. Autry (2001) added six notions of leadership, (1) leadership is not about controlling people, but caring for people and being resourceful. (2) Leadership is not about being boss, but being present for people and building a community at work. (3) Leadership is not about holding on to territory, but letting go of ego, bringing your spirit to work, being your best and most authentic self. (4) Leadership is less concerned with pep talks, but more of creating good places for people to work in. (5) Leadership is more like life, pay your attention to what you are doing, and (6) leadership requires love. In my opinion, “love” is the closest counterpart of “leadership”. Professor Dr. Kor Sawadipanich, my former and beloved teacher, once told me that “if you could win people’s heart, they would be ready to serve you without condition. So these are assumptions beliefs behind servant leadership.

Similarly, Miller wrote that “HEART” is the heart of leadership. And by HEART,

he meant T-Think of other first, E-Expect the best, R- Respond with courage, H-Hunger for wisdom, and A-Accept responsibility. Rearrange as follow: H-Hunger for wisdom, E-Expect the best, A-Accept responsibility, R- Respond with courage, and T-Thinking of other first, we would get “HEART” . Miller points out that these are characters of great leaders. Without characters, management skills are meaningless.

Transformational and Change Leadership

Changes are what management means to be. Changes bring uncomfortable and unfamiliar situations. That is why resistances and conflicts often occur when changes are introduced to work places. Unfortunately, without changes there are no progresses, meaning unlikely adaptable, and finally becoming extinct. Unadaptable entities hardly survive in the changing world. So, new era of management does not only aiming at getting the job done, but also dealing with changes, and good leadership enhances changes more smoothly and effectively as pointed out by Aitken and Higgs (2010) in their great book on Developing Change Leaders: The principles and practices of change leadership development.

Change leadership, in general, refers to any approach of leadership since leadership is a process of leading that results changes. On the other hand a few specific approached based on particular

principles are proposed to be change leadership, such as transactional leadership and transformational leadership, to name a few. In those particular cases, exact names of the approaches should be used instead of general term, for example, Transformational Leadership.

When Bass and Avolio (1994) proposed Transformational Leadership, they meant to contrast their model of change leadership with transactional leadership model. Transactional leadership model based on contingent reward to motivate people to continuous working towards goals, while transformational leadership model aimed at transforming the whole organizational work forces by implementing the Four I's principles. The first I, Idealized influence, meaning that if you wanted your people to behave certain ways, leaders should model as such by himself. In short, influence others by example of leader modelling. "The second I, Inspirational motivation, meaning to motivate people by providing meaning and challenge to their flowers' work. Team spirit is aroused, enthusiasm and optimism are displayed. Envision what expected, communicate that expectation, and commit to goals. The third I, Intellectual stimulation, meaning that leaders stimulated people's efforts to be innovative and creative by questioning assumptions, reframing problems, and approaching old situations in new ways. The fourth I, Individualized consideration, meaning leaders should pay attention to

each individual's needs for achievement and growth by acting as coach or mentor. Individual differs in terms of needs and desires. Leaders recognize individual differences, new learning opportunities and supportive climate are created. Two-way exchanges in communication is encouraged. Leaders are aware of individual concerns, and sees the individual as a whole person rather than as just an employee. Bass and Avolio believed that if leaders implemented these Four I's, their organizations would have been transformed to new stages gradually, resulting permanent and continuous changes.

Transformational leadership is one of many forms of change leadership. When Aitken and Higgs wrote their book on change leadership, they also mentioned about transactional leadership and transformational leadership. However, both writers proposal more general models of change leadership. They pointed out that there were many approaches towards changes, such as Directive, Expert, Negotiating, Educative, and Participative approaches. Directive approach to changes focuses on the leaders' right to manage change and the use of authority to impose change. Participation is limited. Expert approach is seen as a problem-solving process. Experts are needed for problem solving. Negotiating approach emphasizes on the leaders to negotiate and bargain in order to gain desired changes. Educative approach emphasizes on changing people's

values and beliefs. Leaders need winning hearts and minds to gain supports to changes. Participative approach emphasizes on extensive involvement of all people involved and affected by anticipated changes.

Aitken and Higgs reviewed and presented many more interesting concepts, principles, and suggestions for change leadership. For more details, ones could find in their book as cited in references. The main purpose of mentioning their book here is for the understanding and distinguish between transformational leadership and change leadership in general.

SMART Leaders

When I was invited to share my ideas to groups and educational administrators and give lectures to doctoral degree students on the 21st century leaders in education, I proposed “SMART Leadership”. I intend to use SMART in two ways, SMART as daily life use, meaning “witty”, and as a set of abbreviation of S-Serving others, M-Managing changes with vision, A-Aligning resources and people, R-Responding with accountability, and T-Trusting others and empowering.

Serving others (S) is a turn-around character of leaders. A traditional leader is perceived as a boss or someone who controls to make sure that subordinates work hard to get the job done. New era leaders trend to be facilitators and helpers to assist workers to achieve their goals

and help the organizations to realize its goals. Good leaders not only try to help his colleagues, but the most important thing of all is to serve customers, stakeholders, and, of course, shareholders. So, serving is one of necessary characters of the next century leaders.

Managing changes is crucial in organizational management in the new age, the age of rapid changes. More to this is managing changes with vision because vision provides us promised destiny worth to pursue. So, the effective leaders in the future should be able to grab the unstable and changing world fast, decide what to do with strategy, and act in time to get things done with limited information and unclear situation. New era leaders must be able to “fire before aim”. Imagine a smart leader as a hunter, he should has a gut to fire at whatever he thinks it is his target, a rabbit, assumed to say. When the target (the rabbit) moves, then he aims and fires again at the target and get the rabbit, while an unqualified leader would wait, and wait for his chance and gets none. So, Manage changes with vision (M).

All managements have been assigned with limited resources and personnel. Once you identify the target with vision, then align your resources and personnel towards it. When you get the job done, it signifies effectiveness, and if you could get the job done with less resources and personnel, it is efficient management. These are two achievements, effectiveness and efficiency, that all

managements seek to do, no matter when. Align your resources and men (A), to get your job done effectively and efficiently is good management, and to do it cooperatively is leadership.

Good and smart leaders not only do effective and efficient job, but they have to be accountable to their decisions and actions, both to the organizations and societies. To get the job done is not an easy task, but to get the job done morally is much more difficult. So a good leader must respond with accountability (R), which is easy said than done. Many people find it difficult to admit their mistake, but likely to blame other people or circumstances. When a leader does not responds his responsibility, and likes to blame others or situations for his mistake, hardly followers would feel safe to follow him. A leader without followers, he is not titled as a leader anymore.

Trusting others and empowering (T) are not only good principles of management, but also good characters of good leaders. Leading is an action to influence others to follow. Good leading would be the one that followers feel trust to follow. Based on principles, if you trust others people, they are likely to trust you. So, if the leader trust his followers, it is likely that they would trust him to follow. Trust leads to empowerment, and empowerment leads to involvement. The whole process is fruitful to leading. However many managers feel unsafe to delegate their work because they

are responsible to all account under his supervision. But smart leaders would use this principles and processes to enhance and promote their leading for the sake of leading.

And Now What??

Leadership might mean many things to different people. In my opinion, I propose leadership as a process of influencing followers to commit doing all needs to be done to achieve a mutual goal or goals. Leadership could be exercised by both an authorized position or without it. Leading could be done according to assigned assignment or just what one feels like being done. So, leadership is open to anyone who cares and dares to lead, and to whatever thing that needs to be done to make the world better place to live. I have tried to present sufficient views for everyone to act as a leader on whatever you feel need to be done. So, to the heading “Now What” is meant for everyone to decide what to lead and how to do it. Congratulation and good luck!

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