Leadership within the Florida Department of Corrections

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Abstract

As public servants, leaders in the Florida Department of Corrections are faced with the difficult task to be successful leaders. As stakeholders the public demands a professional and efficient organization from its leaders. This research will discuss what attributes are necessary for successful leadership. There were 10 leadership attributes that were identified that are considered to be necessary for successful leadership. Each attribute will be discussed in depth explaining why each is important. There where 14 senior leaders within the Florida Department of Corrections surveyed and asked to rank the 10 attributes in order of importance. The results of the survey were interesting and somewhat surprising on how the leaders ranked the importance of the attributes.

Introduction

Today's leaders are under pressure to be successful at a high level of performance. The organization they lead and the staff they supervise are also expected to operate at these same levels. There are several attributes that leaders need to develop and perfect to become successful in their role as a leader. These attributes will be discussed in such a way to enhance and improve a person's leadership style. The purpose of this study in "Leadership" was conducted to identify positive attributes of leadership to enhance a person's skills. Although some leaders do possess basic skills, this research was conducted to enhance these skills. Leaders of the future will be faced with greater and more complex problems. The information age is here and these problems will have to be confronted at a faster pace than ever before. Although the problems will be much more complex and received at a faster rate, the skills that these leaders must master have not changed. To be successful, these leaders must be able to call on these attributes and use one or all of them each day to survive in their role.

Integrity

Our integrity is how we are characterized as a leader. A high level of integrity is respected by almost all of the staff a leader supervises, or leads. A person of integrity is committed to the mission of the organization and believes in its goals and objectives. Leaders are looked at both on the job and off. They must have integrity in both worlds to be an effective leader. Having integrity in one area and not the other will have employees thinking the leader is a fake and lacks the true ability to lead (Immundo 1991).

Along with integrity is honesty. A leader who is consistent with their beliefs and actions will be considered to be a true "leader" who will not waiver during tough times. When one truly believes in the direction they are taking, subordinate staff will follow and

perform their duties with confidence. The lack of integrity and honesty will have disastrous effects within an organization, which will be long lasting (Immundo, 1991).

Trustworthy

How to become trustworthy is rather simple in theory, but a little harder in practice, is "do not lie." It is better to say nothing than to lie. Once you start lying, you must spend a lot of time covering your tracks and engaging in deception. Then there is the problem in getting caught in a lie. These problems can be avoided by simply telling the truth or saying nothing at all.

Leaders with a reputation for being straightforward and honest occasionally bruise feelings but have earned a reputation for being trustworthy. Trusted leaders find that employees are most likely to be open and honest with them. A reputation for being trusted is something that is earned over time, and actions speak louder than words. Once a person is highly trusted, that trust is not easily lost. Trust is part of the morale fabric of any organization of society. People in leadership positions must be trusted if they expect to be followed (Imundo, 1991).

Competence

To be effective, leaders need to be perceived as competent by their supervisors as well as the majority of staff who they supervise. It is important for leaders to understand their job requirements and expectations of their position. The job becomes a learn as you go experience which is not all that bad considering that in an organization subject to frequent change, job requirements also frequently change. The less understanding a leader has about job responsibilities, the great the likelihood that either no initiative will be shown or the leader will make mistakes. It is very important that the leader has a sense of direction to their jobs. A good leader does not wait for his supervisor to explain what the job responsibilities entails but should seek it out. An understanding of your duties and responsibilities will be perceived by your supervisors as being competent (Imundo, 1991).

If you are not sure of your performance and you are not being judged favorably, ask your supervisor. It is unrealistic to expect a totally clear picture, but you should have a clear understanding through feedback. If you are perceived as being competent and are told so you will have more self-confidence. Unfortunately, it is far too common for employees to view their leaders to be incompetent because of a serious misunderstanding about the leaders' role. To reduce the likelihood of misunderstanding you need a clear understanding of your role and then share this information with the people you supervise. Then when they ask for guidance, if they ask at all, they will not be surprised when you do not have an answer (Imundo, 1991).

Decision Making

It takes real courage to make a decision that scared you to death. Staff will look at leaders and examine their decisions when times are tough. They will want to see

how the leader performs under pressure because they know the role of leadership is making tough decisions.

They will want to see if you can make the tough choices or find the easy way out. Staff are injured by those leaders who can not make the call and bend. More than once leaders have heard staff say, "I am glad I did not have to make that decision."

Decision-making has risks, requiring leaders to pull from experience and knowledge. Napolean said, "Nothing is more difficult and therefore more precious than to be able to decide" (Kahl, 2004, p. 28). Many leaders have the knowledge but lack the courage to make decisions that can make the difference when challenges are encountered. Delaying decisions to look for perfect information is a trap and becomes an excuse for avoiding tough decisions. Go forward and do not retreat, make the decision and fix mistakes as you go. Decision-making can be confrontational. Being non-confrontational will have the leader make mistakes (Kahl, 2004).

If your primary goal is to have everyone like you, you are on the path for failure. During the Civil War, President Lincoln asked congress for 500,000 additional troops for the front lines. Some of the members of congress came to him and told him, "This is not very smart! "If you do this you won't be re-elected" (Devore, 2004, p. 4). President Lincoln answered this way, "It is not necessary that I be re-elected, but it is necessary to those on the front lines to be given these reinforcements in order to survive. "It is the right thing to do" (Devore, 2004, p. 4). This was a tough call to make but it was the right thing to do (Devore, 2004).

Make every decision based on what is right for the organization. When supervising groups of people, do not make decisions that are right for an individual. To be a leader you need to consider what is right for the entire organization. Determine if you are setting a precedence that you'll regret or have haunt you in the future. Don't make decisions that are wrong for the organization just to be nice.

Because it is natural, some leaders want to be liked and hassle free. If being liked is of high value, being accountable for results take a lower priority. It is a rare leader who enjoys strong popularity while being a tough and demanding results driven leader (Mulder, 2003).

Follower

To be a good leader a person must be a good follower also. Thomas Jefferson said, "To do our fellow men the most good in our power, we must lead where we can, follow where we cannot and still go with them, watching always the favorable moment for helping them to another step" (Scarano & Jones, 2000, p. 241).

Being a good follower should not be defined as being weak. A good follower is a person of courage who placed the goals of the organization above personal advancement. Leaders need to spend time on reflecting what type of follower they have become. Do they act the same as a person subordinate of them? A good follower knows the time and place to challenge the boss with an opposing viewpoint. Good leaders surrounds themselves with people who will "Speak up" and not with "yes" people. The good follower knows when the boss had made the final decision and supports the decision of the organizations. A leader who is a good follower aligns

himself with the organization and implements decisions made by the organization as if he had made the decision himself (Scarano & Jones, 2000).

Good followers pass on information to leaders at the next level to assist in making good decisions. They understand they have an obligation to their supervisors and subordinates to be a conduit for information to flow up and down the organization.

At the end of our careers, we all would like to be remembered as a person who was loyal not only to those who worked for us but also to those we worked for. To make this vision a reality we must take time to periodically evaluate how we are doing as both leader and follower.

Courage

It is easy to sit back and do just enough to get by, to not make waves and make everyone happy. It takes courage to act. Employees are frustrated with leaders who lack courage and do not act. Non-action implies that the leader does not care. Employees want leaders to take action and speak up for things that are right and take action. Through courage and actions to do the right thing, this will motivate staff who will be drawn to their leader.

It takes courage for a leader to face the fear of loneliness. The old cliché is right! It is lonely at the top. Margaret Thatcher, the former leader of the United Kingdom said, "Being Prime Minister is a lonely job…You cannot lead from the crowd" (Kahl, 2004, p. 73).

The job as a leader is not to win a popularity contest, but to earn trust and respect as a leader. You must have courage to make tough decisions that may win or lose a popular vote. You can not please everyone all the time.

There is a saying that leaders, like eagles, don't flock. Leaders may know many people, but the best leaders have few close friends. To build friendships takes time and a true leader has very little free time (Kahl, 2004).

You must have true courage to be a leader who can make the tough calls when it effects people personally and professionally. Do not confuse courage with recklessness. Sometimes the most courageous decision is to abandon an opportunity or to turn away from a risk that is too great. Tzu-lu, the master Chinese military general and contemporary of Sun Tzu said, "The man who was ready to beard a tiger or rush a river without caring whether he lived or died – that sort of man I should not take. I certainly take several who approached difficulties with due caution" (Kahl, 2004, p. 74).

General Patton said basically the same thing, "There is a time to take counsel of fear and there is a time to forget your fears. When you have collected all of the facts and fears, make your decision. "After you make your decision, forget all of your fears and go full steam ahead" (Kahl, 2004, p. 74).

From the Chinese philosopher Sun Zau: "If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. "If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle" (Clavell, 1983, p. 18).

Visionary

Visionary leadership requires that the leader sees the whole picture of the organization and not a small piece of it. The leader is in tune with the needs of the organization and the employees. By looking for future problems the leader can head off these problems and prevent them. By preventing future problems the organization is not caught off guard and surprised at it's effects. This prevents doubts and confusion, which lowers moral of the employees. The visionary leader is proactive and seeks solutions to problems before they arise. A leader must keep an open mind at all times and not develop tunnel vision. This will make the decision-making problems larger then they should have been if they could have been prevented to start with (Deangelis, 2003).

Self-confidence

Leaders with strong self-confidence take risks. This self-confidence allows the leaders to make decisions especially the tough decisions that people do not want to make. Leaders gain this self-confidence with experience and learning from mistakes. To be effective they must absorb this information and learn from it (Imundo, 1991).

Formal Communication

Formal communication channels are established by formal relationships, job descriptions, assignments and procedures. These channels parallel the formal lines of authority and responsibility identified in organizational charts, policy manuals, and standard operating procedures. In most organizations or departments, formal communication channels become set in stone. Since power and status are associated with initiating, distributing and receiving communications, it is easy to understand why so much emotion surround an organization's information system. It is also easy to understand why there is great reluctance to change the established flow.   Changes in flow usually cause changes in power. When you feel it is necessary, question the validity and reliability of information that is annunciated through established channels. The movement of information must facilitate the accomplishment of objectives. As objective approaches change, the systems that generate and distribute information must also change. Unnecessary movement of information wastes time, energy and money. In today's fast changing world, leaders at all levels must ask whether the information they receive helps or impedes getting things done. If you are receiving unnecessary or wrong information inform those who create it. The less time you spend handling useless information the more time you devote to good information (Imundo, 1991).

Some of the questions that you should ask when analyzing communications and the channels through which they move are:

- How valued and reliable is the information?
- What results are actually achieved with this information?
- To what degree is this information necessary for accomplishing the objectives?
- What are the true costs of generating and distributing this information?

- Who is involved in generating the information?
- Who is involved in the distribution?
- What are the peoples' motives?
- Is it necessary for these people to continue generating or distributing the information?
- If the information is necessary, can costs generating and redistributing it be reduced?

When changing any facet of a communication process, remember that organization politics is involved considerable skill is required to change a system without generating an avalanche of problems (Imundo, 1991).

In using formal channels of communication, leaders tend to place heaviest emphasis on the downward flow of information, communication with employees. Downward communication helps to bring different levels of an organization together. Not enough emphasis is placed on developing good channels of upward communication. Effective upward communication starts at the bottom of the organization and moves up through each level to the top. You need this feedback to determine if what you have said to employees has been received, properly understood, and will be complied with to the degree expected (Imundo, 1991).

"Grapevine" Communication

Many leaders fear grapevines and try to control or eliminate them. Eliminating "Grapevine" communication is absolutely impossible. If one channel is stopped another will be quickly established. An effective leader learns to cultivate grapevines and use them to benefit the organization (Imundo, 1991).

Develop an ear for grapevine communications; it will help you have insight into what employees are thinking. Grapevines are not always accurate but they go around and cut across formal communication lines and are received very quickly (Imundo, 1991).

One of the dangers of grapevine systems is the distortion. From distortion rumors often arise. To minimize the rumors the employees must see you as a person who will give straight answers to questions. Never lie to the employees. By explaining the reasons for certain changes before distorted meanings are generated, you can minimize problems. When employees are not given reasons for changes, they develop their own (Imundo, 1991).

Leaders can manage the grapevine system to communicate information they do not wish to communicate formally. Putting out information through the grapevine will spread quickly through the ranks of staff (Imundo, 1991).

Method

Several books and periodicals on leadership were reviewed and the positive attributes were identified to determine a good formula to enhance the skills of a leader. Quotes from past historical leaders were included such as presidents, prime-ministers and military leaders from different countries were used in this research. After reviewing

the researched literature, good skills and characteristics were identified and used as a basis for this survey.

Participants

A survey was conducted with 14 participants of senior leaders within the Florida Department of Corrections.   The average years of professional leadership experience was 18 years.

Results

Each participant was given a list of ten leadership attributes.   They identified each attribute by ranking them in order of importance. The surveys were returned and each was analyzed and totaled by ranking from 1-10, with #1 being the highest. The attributes were then listed in order by majority ranking. The following are the results of the survey with the attributes listed in order of importance.

- Integrity
- Trustworthy
- Competence
- Decision-making
- Follower
- Courage
- Visionary
- Self-confidence
- Formal Communication
- Grapevine Communication

Survey Results

Attributes	Rank
Integrity	1
Trustworthy	2
Competence	3
Decision-making	4
Follower	5
Courage	6
Visionary	7
Self-confidence	8
Formal Communication	9
Grapevine Communication	10
Average # of years of experience	*18*

Discussion

After reviewing the surveys, the attributes were ranked in the following order as most importance:

- Integrity
- Trustworthy
- Competence
- Decision-making
- Follower
- Courage
- Visionary
- Self-confidence
- Formal Communication
- Grapevine Communication

The first four attributes: integrity, trustworthy, competence and decision-making, were probably considered normal ranking of importance to the leaders. Follower was ranked #5, above courage, visionary and self-confidence which indicates the leaders being surveyed placed this attribute as a high level which was surprising. Being a leader would suggest that being a follower would be at a lower end of the scale, but the leaders felt that this attribute was necessary to be a good leader. Because the Department of Corrections is ranked structured, this survey suggests that these leaders felt that being a good follower is necessary in this organization.

Communication has always been important to leaders but during this survey, formal communication was ranked #9 which indicated this attribute is not as important as first thought.

Not surprising during this survey was integrity being ranked #1. Integrity is the driving force for a leader as this attribute is respected by employees and supervisors alike. To effectively lead groups of people, the leader must have the respect of employees, for without it would be disastrous. Another surprising result of the survey was that self-confidence was ranked #8 which also suggests that the leaders surveyed did not feel that this attribute was something that a good leader had to possess to be effective.

Besides the rank order of integrity #1, follower #5, self-confidence #8 and formal communication #9, the remaining 6 attributes were ranked in such an order that appeared to be normal or consistent with the belief on how they would be listed in the ranking of importance.

Conclusion

The results of this research suggest that leaders must have integrity to succeed. Integrity defines us as a leader. We are judged by our actions both on and off the job. The senior leaders who participated in this research overwhelmingly felt that integrity was the most important attribute for a leader to possess. A person of high integrity would be characterized as someone who would also possess honesty, trustworthy,

courage, self-confidence and have the competence to make good decisions. Leaders within the Florida Department of Corrections are responsible for supervising large groups of staff and offenders. These leaders must possess good leadership skills to be successful within the Department of Corrections. Because of this type of environment, failure as a leader can cause disastrous effects within an institution.

Leaders must be clear in the direction they are headed and have the conviction to succeed. The future will have many setbacks that leaders will face along with adversity requiring the leader to be flexible and to "think in and out of the box." It will be a must for the leader to continue to enhance their skills as a leader and meet the challenges of a fast paced ever-changing world.

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