

International Conversation Cafe

Lifestyle Topic: Leadership

The Kansas Leadership Center named four characteristics of a good leader in their Spring 2009 Journal. For this discussion we will introduce each characteristic and ask for your opinions and experiences.

1. A good leader needs to diagnose a situation, to identify the problem that needs attention. This means that a good leader is a good listener. They have an ability to ask questions that help them understand what people want and need. They also know the difference between a technical fix and an adjustment of attitude or desire.

For example, let's say that your father is complaining that the car brakes are not working well. A technical solution would be to take the car to the mechanic and have them fixed. But let's say the problem with the brakes continues and you realize it might have something to do with an aging parent driving. The solution could not be solved by the mechanic but by something that would relate to your father's deteriorating ability to drive.

As a group, think of another problem that will take more than a technical fix to right it. The problem is deeper and more complicated.

To fully understand the problem means that the leader must have an ability to look at the problem from all angles. It is more about the process of understanding than pushing for one solution.

2. A good leader needs to be self aware, able to identify your own capabilities, vulnerabilities, and triggers.

Describe what a capability, vulnerability and trigger is.

The following is list of values for a leader with self awareness. Check three that you feel competent in and three that you would like to improve on. Then share one competency and vulnerability with the group.

- a. Remain calm and in control of emotions.
- b. Solicit and respond constructively to feedback from others.
- c. Change course based on feedback from others
- d. Keep ego from getting in the way of process
- e. Speak honestly about openness to alternative outcomes
- f. Maintain energy and commitment in the face of uncertainty, ambiguity and conflict.

3. A good leader knows how to facilitate intervention. They know that leadership is about activity (interventions), not position (authority.)

What do you think this statement means?

The activity of leadership includes all the people involved in the conflict. A leader will be able to engage those not usually heard in the conversation. In this sense, interventions are intentionally designed and delivered.

Is it possible to be in authority and not be a leader? Give an example.

The following list names skills that are necessary to intervene skillfully. Which one do you think are most necessary? Please explain.

- a. Change course when actions are not leading to progress
 - b. Raise uncomfortable or difficult issues that impact the group's progress
 - c. Strategically use strengths of self and others to make progress
4. A good leader knows how to energize others. People know that if they are heard and are part of the solution, then they are more likely to be enthused with the solutions. On the other hand, when a conflict is resolved, there usually is some loss. Not everyone gets everything they want. The ability to recognize those losses and speak from the heart is the mark of a compassionate leader, the kind of person people follow.

Name a leader you respect. Do you see any of the four characteristics in them? Why do you admire them?

The following quotes are by Abraham Lincoln, the sixteenth President of the United States. Under his leadership, the North and South resolved their conflict and remained one United States, not two.

Choose a quote and answer the following questions.

1. *What does the quote has to say about leadership?*
2. *Give a real life story that illustrates the quote.*

“The best way to destroy an enemy is to make him a friend.”

“Success is going from failure to failure without losing your enthusiasm.”

“You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today.”