

LEADERSHIP Excellence



Warren Bennis

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First Things First

When managers and leaders fail to attend to daily prime matters, time turns thief. Gone, with the constant tick-took of the clock are the golden options, closed are winning windows of opportunity.



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Remaking Leadership

Cowards and cynics need not apply.



by Cleve W. Stevens

THE WORLD HAS FOREVER changed—in ways that tax even the best leaders. These dramatic, seismic shifts require a fresh, even radical, take on how we work and live together and how we lead people and organizations.

Gone are the days when *simply being a decent person* with sufficient business experience, sound social skills, and some technical leadership skill would do. Today younger employees *expect* (even *demand*) more than stability and a pay check. To lead us out of the Great Recession, *leaders must see their charge as something greater*—and see themselves as catalytic agents in the lives of their people, enabling them to realize their talents, find purpose in their work, and experience meaningful contribution to *something larger than themselves*.

The global recession served to magnify the impact of two basic realities contributing to this new reality.

First is the social ferment of the 1960s and its continuing social impact. The *subversive sixties* were the root cause of a cultural sea change. The Boomers who were at its center were part of a broader moral advance, a shift that would ultimately result in a more expansive understanding of democracy and individual rights. Over the years, many of the ideals that fueled that turbulent time have become a part of mainstream contemporary attitudes.

Those Boomers and their children have a different understanding of what *professional* or *work life* should be. Their expectations for what is and should be a *normal employment experience* go far beyond those of their parents and grandparents. What they want and need from their leaders is more involved—particularly when it comes to matters of collaboration, contribution, personal growth, self-expression, and meaning.

The second aspect of the irrevocable change is the technological explosion. The digital age has permanently altered the nature and speed of communication and information. And it has given a new meaning to the idea of *networking* (via the hyper-networked world of social media), creating a situation

where *far greater transparency* is all but unavoidable and surely expected.

In the brave new world that these changes have spawned, a conventional 9 to 5, transactional approach (a *quid pro quo* based on an exchange of mutual self interest—"I'll pay you a salary and you'll give me your labor") won't work (not for those who want to do more than merely survive). What is required is a brand of leadership that reaches into and nourishes the soul of the follower—a brand of leadership that recognizes the people and their growth as *the primary product*, irrespective of the product or service. Yes, things like innovation, responsiveness, and efficiency remain paramount, but they become natural, inevitable byproducts of this distinctive, edgy culture.

For this leader, the only thing that merits the same *imperative status* as the development of people is the achievement of excellence at all levels of the organization. The realization of excellence, achievement of the extraordinary, go hand in glove with the growth imperative: the production of compelling results becomes the concrete measure of the extent of the leader's success in developing the people and instilling top-to-bottom excellence.

Oh, and the sticky matter of profit—shareholder value, which we've been taught to see as the *only value*—doesn't go away. Rather, it becomes *an organic by-product of the culture of systematic growth and achievement*. The suggestion that the *only responsibility* of business is to make a profit will no longer do. These aren't just the sentiments of some occupy-Wall-Street radicals, but rather those of *committed free-market capitalists*.

Those who will show us the way out of our dogged economic malaise are leaders of imagination and courage, who grasp the complexity of our tumultuous era, pregnant with both peril and possibility. They realize and accept the fact that the world has changed and continues to change. Above all they are leaders who see that *business is a human enterprise*, intended to *serve the people*, not the other way around.

This growth-focused, people-centric approach to leadership is not for the faint of heart. It requires courage and toughness to demand and expect the best from yourself and those you lead. It's the antithesis of the every-child-gets-a-trophy syndrome of self-esteem movement. Self-esteem is a function of having the guts to *take yourself on*, to push yourself and your followers to expand and realize excellence, realize the untapped talents that still exist within. For this leader and the organization he leads, accountability goes up, not down; expectation goes up, not down, and the top and bottom line go up (and to right, as it were), not down.

Why do leaders of this stripe generate exceptional results? When reasonably talented people of good faith and sufficient smarts have the chance to satisfy some of the basic, higher needs and do so *at work*, good things invariably follow. That is, when they are given the *systematic opportunity for meaningful professional and personal growth*, consistently contribute in a way that counts, are cared for, have a sense of belonging, and



have the chance to create real meaning (even if they're only building widgets), they show up very differently. They feel better about themselves, and hence are better parents, friends, lovers, and church or synagogue members. And when they come back the next morning, they are better employees: better leaders, followers, and workers, who are more committed and willing to go the extra mile without being asked to do so. Results naturally improve, and, with reasonably savvy leaders at the helm, can go through the roof.

Thirty years ago leaders who operated from this point of view did so as a matter of choice—it wasn't necessary (they knew they could still succeed via conventional measures), but they liked the idea of growing their people as the means to success. Today, given the dramatic and irreversible changes in our world, the smartest leaders have realized that **habitual success requires a radically different take on the meaning and objective of the business organization**. Profits—bold, explosive profits—matter, but people are the endgame. LE

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ACTION: Lead growth in a people-centric way.