



To : Seafarers Our Ref : Mentoring Letter 4 – Becoming a Leader
From : Marine Mentor Date : 25th January 2020

Dear Colleague,

This Company has undergone many management changes over the years, but has a long history as a responsible and progressive employer. In my early days at sea, the company sent even 2NO's and 3EO's on various Management courses. Yet, shipboard management was easier, we didn't have Port State Inspections - not even an SMS. (Life was bliss, and all we really had to worry about was a cardex PMS – Planned Maintenance System!) Walport movies (with safety trailers) and "Command and Control" was the order of the day. Seafarers in those days expected to be led this way, as they had been for centuries. Marine Insurance Acts reinforced the aura around the Master by referring to him as "Master under God." (Gone are the days...sigh...)

In emergency situations aboard ships, this of course remains an effective style of leadership to employ if and when the circumstances demand it. However, Captains - and of course Chief Engineers - who are comfortable in their own skins, and who strive to be professional, are able to balance the vessel and crew's needs above their own perceived need for a display of naval-styled respect. They have the confidence to take responsibility, and do not reflect any fears of making mistakes.

With the hugely increased taskload and responsibilities of the modern Master, he needs his team to function efficiently in order to produce the exceptional performance demanded of our ships. But, sustained excellence will only be delivered by people who are confident, empowered to do so, and desire to excel. The Company employs generally well-trained and drilled junior officers and crews who operate in an environment in which they are well confident, and capable. It is the Master's role to fashion them into a team, which pays attention to detail and takes accountability. The best way to do this is through sound leadership as opposed to ego-driven autocracy which serves only to produce average or even sub-standard performances. The latter reflects adversely on the Master, exposes his style of management as being shaky, impairs his own image and dignity, and ultimately adds to his stress levels without him (or her) even being aware of the real cause..

But, very few leaders are born into leadership. Even then, those who appear to have an aura or charisma about them, will often get it wrong unless they understand and use their talents wisely. Others need to work hard at developing their leadership attributes.

There are many courses on the subject, but in most cases, we learn from others. We're human, so unfortunately, sometimes (often) we adopt their mistakes also. So what are the qualities of a good leader?

VALUES

- Great leaders have sound core values, they both require and display a high degree of honesty, integrity, trust, wisdom, responsibility and fairness.
- Great leaders treat their team members with respect and fairness at all times. They affirm them through complimenting them or by simple gestures.
- Great leaders are good communicators, they can communicate their vision and create a good working environment. They also practice effective listening.

- Great leaders are confident, strong and decisive, but also humble. They are ready to listen, and to admit that they don't have all the answers.
- Leadership is the ability to get people to work for you because they want to. Great leaders commit to gaining the cooperation of their key people daily, by getting on well with them.
- Good leaders can customise their approach according to the person, in order to get the best out of them. Remember that not all human beings are the same. We have cultural perspectives, language barriers, different educational backgrounds, personality traits and varying value systems all of which greatly affects how individuals process and interpret information. Some people work well under pressure, others don't. Some respond best to tough love, others take it personally and shut down.
- Good leaders never but NEVER play the Blame Game.

ATTITUDE / ABILITY

- Great Leaders have a clear, exciting vision of where they are going and what they are trying to accomplish. They are enthusiastic, and not afraid to roll up their sleeves.
- Great leaders are purposeful – they maintain a positive focus, and ensure that everyone on their team is also focussed and concentrating on their tasks.
- Good leaders have the courage to take risks in the achievement of their goals without the assurance of success.
 - Great leaders are calm and composed under pressure
 - Great leaders have excellent strategy planning skills, and have the ability to look ahead.

Many books have been written on the subject, and it's impossible to do it justice in a simple letter. Here are a few more pointers:

1. Leaders will succeed if they [display authenticity](#):

- By being learners.
- By being willing to be transparent and being known.
- By being self aware -- understanding themselves and others.
- By being open to input from others, even those below them.
- By maintaining integrity, honesty, consistency, and ethical behavior.

2. Leaders will succeed if they [value their people](#):

- By believing and trusting in people.
- By maintaining a high view of people, and showing respect and dignity.
- By putting others first before self.
- By listening -- receptive, nonjudgmental listening.

3. Leaders will succeed if they [develop people](#):

- By providing for learning and growth.
- By developing potential.
- By modeling their own development.
- By encouraging their own people.

4. Leaders will succeed if they [provide leadership](#):

- By envisioning the future for the whole team.
- By using intuition and foresight to direct the organization.
- By taking initiative and moving out ahead.
- By clarifying goals and expectations, and understanding what it will take to get to the vision.

5. Leaders will succeed if they [share leadership](#):

- By sharing power and empowering others.
- By sharing status in relation to position, honour, and self-promotion.
- By using persuasion to influence others instead of coercion.
- By pushing authority down.

6. Leaders will succeed if they [build community](#):

- By enhancing relationships and relating well to others.
- By promoting a sense of belonging and connection for all team members.
- By working collaboratively, emphasizing teamwork.
- By valuing the differences of others -- differing gifts, cultures, personalities, and viewpoints.

Putting it succinctly, I believe that *“Leaders create the atmosphere in which others excel.”* This includes encouraging others to become excellent leaders themselves, leaders who will most likely emulate you. You’re clearly in prime position to be their role-model, mentor and coach. Your role can never be understated in this respect.

My friend and mentor Mark Price, an Advisor to a past Governor of California, motivational speaker to the US motor industry, and actor, once said that a leader is NOT the first person up the ladder when it is put in place, he/she is the person who steadies it and points the way for those he leads.

I have no doubt whatsoever that every one of us wants to be that great leader, and that we wish we could be. But how do we get there? Not by simply reading articles like the above. We need to go beyond doing courses, and to work on ourselves. If I don’t understand who I am, how will I understand others? More about that, next week!

Kind regards,

Mike Melly

NEXT WEEK

SELF-REFLECTION FOR MENTORS (Psychology 101)