


Value based Leadership

by: Joseph O'Connor



Joseph O' Connor, in this article, speaks about the importance of the attendance of the leadership on people and his values. He questions managers that use leadership based on authority, and tell us with concrete examples, what can happened to the peoples motivation, if exists incongruence about what Leaders tell and do.

The Peak Performance integrates in this work, answers about important issues, like how leadership and individual coaching, can improve the performance of the team.



Joseph O'Connor is one of the best known and respected trainers of NLP and coaching in the world. He has taught in North and South America, Hong Kong and Singapore, (where he was awarded the medal of the National Community Leadership Institute), New Zealand and many European Countries. Joseph has been a visiting member of the faculty for NLP University in Santa Cruz, California, and a visiting trainer with NLP Comprehensive.

Joseph has worked with many companies as a trainer and consultant, including BA, HP Invent, and the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) in Vienna, consulting on Industrial co-operation projects in developing countries.

He is the author of seventeen books translated into twenty four languages, including many of the best selling and most respected books. He was the first author outside the United States to write an NLP book. His book, 'Introducing NLP' has been used for over ten years as the basic reference book for NLP study and has sold over 100,000 copies.

Joseph is co-founder of Lambent do Brasil. He lived in the UK for many years and now lives in Brazil.

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If we treat people as they are we make them worse. If we treat them as they ought to be, we help them become what they are capable of becoming.
(Goethe)

Leadership must be the most used and multifaceted word in business at the moment. There are hundreds of different labels for leaders and leadership styles, where do values fit in and what does Value based leadership mean?

Who is a leader? It's not someone who tells you what to do. Someone who simply tells you what to do is a boss. You do it because they say so. A leader is someone you want to follow, not who you have to follow. Authority is necessary as part of living in society and working in business but on its own, it's not enough to make a leader.

The original meaning of the word 'leadership', is to go on a journey in the company of others. So a leader is going somewhere, they have a goal and a vision. They attract others, so they appeal to others, and influence others. Those who join them on the journey trust them to know the road.

So being a leader comes from the natural human striving to reinvent yourself. It means developing yourself. It involves the ability to see the big picture and the wider system as well as paying attention to where you are putting your feet on the road. And it means inspiring others to join you on the road.

"Authority is given, but leadership needs to be earned"

Picture this company. In one department they have a boss, who tells them what to do and expects them to obey. He is not interested in his people, only as a means to an end – getting things done. He takes little interest in his people, does not help them connect what they do to the company vision, and is not interested in what is important to them. 'My way or the highway' is his motto. He has the authority, but strangely enough people often seem to find excuses not to do things. The people in his department are unhappy, and behind on their work. When things get behind, he responds by doing more of what he is doing already. This is the archetypal boss. Luckily they are going extinct very fast, because their methods simply do not work. However some elements of this dinosaur can still be found in many companies.

'My way or the highway'

Contrast this with a leader. He takes an interest in his people, he knows them as individuals and he knows and respects what is important to them. He knows that the same incentive does not work for everyone and so he does not try to impose it on everyone. He coaches his people, not only those who are not performing well, but also those who are. People feel they are contributing to the organization and they respect this manager. He gets the job done, but does not rely on his authority alone, but on the fact that his people want to do the work well. He inspires them to their best. This is the manager who is a leader. Would that every manager was like this, but every manager can pay attention to leading based on values – their values of respect and fairness and motivating and inspiring others by what is important to them, not what is important to him or her.

A boss has power, a leader has influence.

A boss depends on their position of authority; a leader gains authority by being respected by his people.

A boss gets people to do things and a leader gets people to want to do things.

Why do they want to do things? Because they are motivated and inspired by what is important to them and this is value based leadership.



“. People follow a leader because they want to, not because they have to.”

There are two paradoxes about value-based leadership. First is that it can only be given and not taken. A person may have power and authority, but this is not the same as leadership. People follow a leader because they want to, not because they have to. A leader without followers or fellow travelers is like the sound of one hand clapping.

The second paradox is that the first person a leader has to inspire is themselves. How can they inspire others to join you on a journey if you cannot inspire themselves?

So how do leaders make people want to follow them on the journey? They appeal to what is important. All leaders have a vision, a vision of how the world could be, we all have our individual visions, but leaders tap into something more than just their vision, they tap into a common vision. They are on a journey and that journey is important to them. And when we talk about important we are talking about values, values are quite simply what is important to you. Values provide the energy to get out of bed in the morning; they provide the fuel for the journey towards the goal. Without value, the journey cannot start.

Take a moment to think of some leaders that you admire. People that you resonate with. They can be in any area,

business, religious, military or any area of life. They may be famous people, or friends or family you know well, but others do not. What do these people have in common? One thing they must have in common is they appeal to something that is important to you. If they did not, you would not admire them. You recognize them as leaders because what they do and what they stand for is important to you. Their values resonate with yours.

“Do you like to take decisions with your door closed? In the decisions that you take, do you usually involve others?”

Good managers will deal with problem behaviour from the point of view of values. Rather than simply challenging the behaviour, they make it clear that the behaviour is unacceptable while pacing and acknowledging the values behind it. Behaviour is purposeful. We always act to achieve something that is important to us, something we value. Unfortunately, the actions or behaviour may not be a very good way of getting it and may cause a lot of trouble for others. For example a manager we know had a lot of trouble with one member of his team. This person would



constantly challenge the thoughts and proposals of other members. He played the Devil's advocate, finding faults with details. This got very wearing. The other members of the team started to resent him, one of them said, 'I would not feel so bad, if he contributed something positive every now and then, but it is always so negative.' This person's behaviour was destroying team rapport, yet his area of expertise was essential and could not be replaced in the current project.

“Does Talk and Walk come together?”

We suggested the manager take this man aside, ask him what he wanted to achieve through his questioning, and why this was important to him. It turned out that he valued safety very highly. A project in his previous job had ended in disaster, because plans were not properly checked, and crucial details were left out. The company lost a lot of money. He vowed this would never happen again in any work he was engaged on. 'I want the plan to be absolutely fool proof in every detail.' was how he expressed it. Safety and accuracy of detail were very important to him and our friend shared these values and said so. Now came the \$64,000 question. 'Is your constant challenging getting you what you want?' The answer was no. The other team members were not paying attention to his contribution, they were not listening, paying him lip service only in their attempt to move on. This made him more nervous still and he challenged all the more. The manager suggested that he had a very useful role as Devil's Advocate of the group, but should wait until plans were at a reasonable stage of formation before asking for details. He agreed.

“Does people filed diary that companies are not making walk what they tell?”

After that the group's effectiveness was greatly increased. The others knew that they had the space they needed to develop plans and they had better be good ones. Challenges came later and were more constructive, and very valuable. Several small improvements were made that made the project more cost efficient. Our friend paced the man's values and utilised them for the benefit of the group.

An extensive study of leadership in medium sized European companies showed that about two thirds of major decisions were taken in line with declared company strategy. However only about one third of decisions of middle importance were in line with company declared strategy. This seems reasonable from the outside, but remember that the big decisions were taken behind closed doors by a small group of top people and the full implications were often kept secret for good commercial reasons.

The smaller day-to-day decisions that affected the employees were out in the open and the majority of these were not consistent with the company strategy. People saw every day that the companies were not walking their talk, this can lead to disillusionment and cynicism. At the extreme there is the example of a large United States organization that had published its values one of which was putting employees first. This same organization cut employees health benefits payments and increased spending on country club membership for the top executives. This is not value based leadership and this organization can hardly complain if the people see this and get cynical. There is an important lesson – stick to your values. People do notice. And it is important.

“Important lesson – execute your values!”

Value based leadership can come from anywhere in the organization. What is sure is that if the people at the top do not demonstrate it, and then they will lose respect. People will become cynical about the values and even scoff at them. Then they will start working just for money and every survey has shown that while it is important to pay people a fair wage, once this is reached, then other values are more important than money, particularly, challenge, career advancement and respect.

“Important Values, to take care in the values based leadership: challenge, career, growing and respect”;

Unless a manager leads their people by making their work challenging and fulfilling and giving them respect, they might well change jobs, taking all that highly prized and

painstakingly earned knowledge and expertise to their old employer’s competitor. In this way it is easy to see that value-based leadership is not an abstract ideal, but enlightened self interest and good management.

“Leadership based in values begins on the top.”

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