

The Leadership Factor

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It is becoming more and more difficult for businesses, large and small, to survive in today's marketplace.

- 71% of businesses founded in 1992 did not survive long enough to see their 10 year anniversary in 2002
- The average life expectancy of a multinational corporation-Fortune 500 or its equivalent-is between 40 and 50 years.
- The average life expectancy of all firms, regardless of size, in Japan and much of Europe, is only 12.5 years.

Yet many companies not only survive, but thrive during challenging times. Many factors contribute to business resilience including ample financing, favorable market conditions, quality products and services, a strong client base and skilled employees. Yet numerous studies point to one factor being the most important in achieving and sustaining long-term success: **Leadership**.

The challenge is that there are as many ideas about what leadership is as there are thinkers, writers and leaders! Much is written about leadership, not all of which is helpful or effective. In fact, there are as many definitions of leadership as there are writers and thinkers on the topic. Here is a classic from Pulitzer Prize winning James MacGregor Burns from his 1978 book, Leadership:

"Leadership over other human beings is exercised when persons with certain motives and purposes mobilize, in competition or conflict with others, institutional, political, psychological, and other resources so as to arouse, engage and satisfy the motives of followers."

In his book, Certain Trumpets: The Call of Leaders, another Pulitzer prize winner, Gary Willis, takes issue with MacGregor's definition. He submits that while this definition tries to cover all bases, it leaves out one critical element – mutuality. Willis insists that leaders "...take others toward the object of their joint quest." People will only be led where they want to go, otherwise the efforts are closer to coercion or manipulation than leadership. Leaders may spend effort helping people determine where they want to go--

"...our definition of leadership (is) the capacity to influence others by unleashing their power and potential to impact the greater good."

*Ken Blanchard,
Leading to a Higher Level*

"Leadership is a serving relationship with others that inspires their growth and makes the world a better place."

*Lance Secretan,
Inspire: What Great Leaders Do*

After sifting through the many definitions and myths of leadership, we are left with a workable definition of leadership as having:

- A clear, compelling vision
- The power to translate that vision into reality
- The ability to rally people behind that vision.

If any of these elements is missing, leadership will not happen. Leadership requires followership and the capacity to realize visions. Leadership development builds the skills, mindset and practices that render people effective at crafting and accomplishing clear, shared visions and goals.

References:

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