



GETTING REAL: THE NEED FOR GENUINE LEADERS

by Linda Moran, Craig Perrin and Chris Blauth

The unprecedented upheavals of the last several years have created equally unprecedented challenges for leaders — from supervisors on the factory floor to executives in corporate suites throughout the world. Thanks to tighter budgets and competitive pressures, these men and women must achieve more results — faster — through workforces that are often diminished, unfocused, and demoralized.

And small wonder: during the last several years there has been a litany of bad news from all parts of the world. Global terrorism. Long-festering international disputes that have exploded into violence and out-and-out war. Unsettling geopolitical realignments. Corporate scandals. Economies in trouble. Many organizations have disappeared altogether; those remaining have cut back and dug in.

And what about an organization's leaders? In our work with leaders at all levels in organizations from virtually every business sector, we have observed the following reactions to this uncertain world:

- ***Collaboration under attack.*** Competition for scarce internal resources—and even sometimes for continued employment—can turn the most collaborative leader into a cut-throat competitor.
- ***The paralysis of zero slack.*** Many organizations are so lean that they cannot absorb even a small misstep or miscalculation. The resulting stress on employees and leaders alike can be immobilizing.
- ***Panic “telling.”*** For a struggling organization, it can seem more efficient to give up on participatory decision-making, along with coaching and employee development, and revert instead to giving orders.
- ***Wary workforces.*** Uncertain employees are pulling back, avoiding risk — putting more energy into self-preservation than they are into the organization's well-being.

Unfortunately, although these reactions are understandable responses to difficult and uncertain times, they undercut employee involvement, and threaten to create workforces that simply do what they're told. In fact, these reactions are precisely opposite from the behaviors organizations need to encourage if they are to be successful in the long or the short term. In other words, the complexity of the challenges organizations face today is the best argument for encouraging *more* employee involvement, not less.

Because leaders are under such intense pressure to generate short-term results, they may feel justified in neglecting their responsibilities to develop and inspire their employees. Over time, however, this approach will not only reduce employee effectiveness. It will suck the workforce dry, and create a work environment that employees will be only too happy to escape at the earliest opportunity.

Leadership is easy during good times — easier, at least, than during times of retrenchment when there are tough decisions to make, and no cushion of prosperity to fall back on. For a generation of managers who may have known only growth, hard times can be especially challenging. But, like a family that needs good budgeting skills most when money is tight, organizations need good leaders most during hard times — leaders who can tap into the very best efforts of all their employees, and get everyone headed in the same direction. It's the only way organizations can solve problems and seize opportunities with the creativity and speed required to stay competitive.

WHAT EMPLOYEES WANT FROM THEIR LEADERS

To explore what leaders need in order to get results in today's world, AchieveGlobal conducted a series of research projects in 2002 and 2003. Our purpose was to reexamine the foundation of our thinking about leadership and to determine what additional types of training might be necessary to prepare successful leaders in the future.

Central to the research was a 2003 online survey of 747 employees from the United States and the United Kingdom (32 percent of whom were executive-level managers). They were first asked to think of someone they knew who consistently demonstrated outstanding leadership. They were then asked to rate how characteristic each of 38 specific leadership behaviors was of that person.

These behaviors were successfully matched, first against the 17 competencies identified by AchieveGlobal in 1997, and then against a set of five critical leadership qualities.

This research supports what we have learned in our

on-going leadership development work with all kinds of organizations. First of all, AchieveGlobal's 1997 landmark critical incident study of leadership identified a solid foundation for building leadership skills at every level from frontline employee to executive. However, we believe there are some significant shifts in what today's employees expect from their leaders:

- Today's employees place greater emphasis on the ethical, "do the right thing" behaviors, especially when those behaviors would be easy to avoid — behaviors such as "makes and keeps realistic promises," "shows concern for the problems and feelings of others," and "avoids actions that bring personal benefit at the expense of others." Given the spate of corporate scandals and the declining level of trust in the organization, it should not be surprising that people want leaders they can count on to be ethical all the time, not just when it's easy. People want leaders who get results, yes, but they are also looking for leaders whose intentions are honorable, so to speak — and who are seen to be honorable.
- Employees today have a greater expectation that their leaders will demonstrate technical competence. One likely reason could be the need for leaders to step in and perform tasks they may once have delegated.
- There is an increased expectation for leaders to be big-picture thinkers — able to foresee the future, for example, and anticipate the consequences of actions.
- Employees look more to leaders for traditional performance management skills, including coaching and giving feedback — possibly for guidance at a time when their work responsibilities are changing rapidly and are not always well defined.

BEHIND THE SKILLS, LEADERSHIP QUALITIES

What seems evident is that employees are looking for more than people with leadership skills. They are also looking for people with leadership

qualities. Employees see in these qualities evidence of effective leaders whom they can also trust. Leaders with the intestinal fortitude to step up to the difficult moment, the tough challenge, the risky decision. Leaders whose skills and humanity shine through. Leaders who are *real*.

Employees hunger for such leaders. For them they will do almost anything.

What is a leadership quality? We define it as a personal attribute that emerges over time when someone applies a leadership skill in a variety of situations, and in ways that encourage participation. It's not enough, in other words, for leaders to be skillful at developing plans. They must also be able to work with others to put those plans into action. After all, the definition of leadership is achieving results through others.

These, then, are the ingredients of a leadership quality:

- Consistent application of a skill or skills...
- through interactions over time...
- in ways that encourage positive participation from others.

As a result of this research, AchieveGlobal has extended its understanding of effective leadership to encompass the qualitative as well as the strictly behavioral. We found that there are **five** qualities today's leaders must develop if they are to succeed at achieving results through other people:

Collaborative. Successful leaders know that the best ideas, plans, products, and processes emerge from a collective effort. Even though they may sometimes grow impatient with the collaborative process, they realize that the end result will be better—and that collaboration motivates people to do their best.

Successful leaders demonstrate collaboration by:

- Speaking clearly and plainly with others
- Demonstrating enthusiasm about achieving important goals
- Creating an environment in which work can be done by others
- Helping others to meet their challenges
- Expressing confidence in the abilities and potential of others

- Giving freely of time, resources, and positive advice
- Serving as an advocate for those facing difficulties

Inventive. Gone are those predictable days when leaders could be successful by simply following established procedures. Success today requires alert, creative, fast-thinking men and women who are not afraid to take risks in order to overcome obstacles and take advantage of opportunities.

Successful leaders demonstrate inventiveness by:

- Initiating positive action without being asked to do so
- Taking logical steps to accomplish desired results
- Drawing on all available means to solve stubborn problems
- Responding quickly and effectively to changing conditions
- Finding new ways to accomplish desired results
- Putting clever ideas into action
- Coming up with unusual solutions to stubborn problems

Skilled. Leaders gain credibility when they are seen as competent people who value the need for continuous learning and training—both for technical and interpersonal skills. Furthermore, as organizations continue to slim down, leaders are valued for their ability to step in and “do the work.”

Successful leaders demonstrate skillfulness by:

- Taking every important task through to completion
- Acquiring key skills required to achieve desired results
- Having the experience and temperament to head up important projects
- Carrying important tasks through to the best possible conclusion
- Mastering all necessary skills to achieve desired results
- Continuing to sharpen vital skills
- Balancing the demands of multiple critical tasks

Visionary. The challenges of modern life are too complex, and the rate of change too fast, for leaders to demonstrate this quality in an ivory tower.

Visionary leaders know that success depends not just on “seeing” the future, but on creating a shared vision and working with others to make it happen.

Successful leaders demonstrate this quality by:

- Working tirelessly to achieve important goals
- Continually watching for opportunities and dangers
- Foreseeing a better future and helping it come to pass
- Mapping a clear path to desired goals
- Championing an unpopular idea that will help the organization
- Taking measured risks to achieve important goals
- Inspiring others with both actions and words
- Painting an inspiring future that motivates others

Mindful. Loyalty to organizations is an artifact from the past. That’s why it’s all the more important for people to have good relationships with their leaders, and to know that these leaders uphold the organization’s values. Mindful leaders are always aware of how their behavior affects others—emotionally, cognitively, and operationally. Mindful leaders are alert—especially when it comes to early warning signs of potential problems that may require their attention. At the same time, mindful leaders demonstrate a steadiness in the face of adversity that keeps people focused, calm, and moving forward.

Successful leaders demonstrate mindfulness by:

- Making and keeping realistic promises
- Applying the same performance standards to all direct reports
- Avoiding actions that bring personal benefit at the expense of others
- Freely admitting mistakes
- Respecting the human needs of others

- Showing concern for the problems and feelings of others
- Reflecting on the implications of past and pending decisions

The Basic Principles

By themselves, the qualities of genuine leadership do not necessarily produce the kind of leaders people are looking for. What’s missing are guidelines for how to work with other people in all those situations that aren’t necessarily covered by a specific leadership skill — work with them in ways that will not only achieve specific results, but help create an organization of strong and committed employees.

These guidelines are provided by AchieveGlobal’s time-tested Basic Principles for working with others to accomplish results. For the

past three decades organizations large and small have used them to establish the mutual respect and acceptance of individual responsibility which are the hallmarks of all successful group efforts. Originally five in number, a sixth Basic Principle was recently added to make more explicit the ethical dimension inherent in the first five. Given the lack of organizational trust and the pressure to do the expedient rather than the right thing, a balance of all six principles is needed now more than ever.

1. Focus on the situation, issue or behavior, not on the person. The challenges facing leaders today call for level-headed objectivity, not blaming.

2. Maintain the self-confidence and self-esteem of others. To encourage people’s best thinking, leaders need to let them know they have ideas worth contributing—but this Basic Principle is about more than that. To handle the ups and downs of change — to persevere when things are going wrong — people need all the self-confidence they can muster. By following this principle, leaders will help employees realize their own worth.

THE FIVE QUALITIES OF A GENUINE LEADER

Collaborative
Inventive
Skilled
Visionary
Mindful

3. Maintain constructive relationships. Especially during difficult times when resources are scarce, it's tempting to find fault with other departments, and other people. The fact is, however, that everyone needs to work together to achieve what should be, after all, common organizational objectives. Maintaining constructive relationships can include addressing festering inter-departmental issues, participating in support networks, and offering help when it's needed.

4. Take initiative to make things better. Successful leaders don't wait to be told to make improvements. They know that it's everyone's job to do what needs doing.

5. Lead by example. AchieveGlobal's research indicates that leaders are always being scrutinized by the people around them. The best way they can influence people's behavior in a productive direction is to model the behavior they want to see in others.

6. Think beyond the moment. This principle encourages leaders to consider the consequences of their actions, both short- and long-term. It also exhorts them to try to anticipate the future, and to set goals and make plans that will guarantee the organization's survival and success. This principle underscores the fact that the best leader is a kind of organizational statesman or stateswoman — always aware of how actions today will affect the organization tomorrow.

THE PAYOFF OF GENUINE LEADERSHIP

Genuine leaders know how to achieve results without sacrificing either long-term organizational health or employee commitment. They build a work environment which enable employees to learn and grow, and to see clearly the impact of their individual efforts on the success of the organization. Guided by the Basic Principles and drawing on their qualities of leadership, genuine leaders accomplish these goals by:

- Creating an environment in which collaboration produces timely, high-quality decisions, rather than too-little, too-late outcomes
- Responding to a shortage of resources with creativity and resolve, rather than with “I win, you lose” competitiveness
- Finding time to coach and develop the people who work for them, because they know that those people are the organization's future

- Exemplifying an awareness of, and confidence in, what the future holds, and imparting this vision to those around them
- Motivating others to stay the course during difficult times and to go the extra mile to help the organization achieve its objectives

The impact of genuine leadership is perhaps best expressed in the words of genuine leaders themselves:

“The more we communicated, the more engaged our employees became, and the higher the productivity became. And believe it or not, the better our financials became.”

“Yes, you need results. No results, no company. But I tell my managers it's just as important for them to develop their people. So we stress coaching, formal and informal. Recognition. We take performance reviews seriously. This is how we sustain the organization for the future.”

“It's hard now with layoffs and heavier workloads. But in my particular department we have a great team. I've made a big effort to be fair and honest and open with everybody, and I think they appreciate it. It definitely feels like we're getting the job done.”

“We're always reinventing ourselves around here. It's pretty chaotic. The managers I observe who are the most successful seem to send out positive vibes—that they know what they're doing and have a winning team. They challenge people to do more, but in a motivating rather than a punitive way.

THE SIX BASIC PRINCIPLES

1. Focus on the situation, issue or behavior, not on the person.
2. Maintain the self-confidence and self-esteem of others.
3. Maintain constructive relationships.
4. Take initiative to make things better.
5. Lead by example.
6. Think beyond the moment.

You want to work for people like that.”

Although it's impossible to predict exactly what the future holds, it is safe to say that organizations will be dealing with the fall-out from today's upheavals for years to come. For leaders it's a new and tougher world, one in which getting results may depend on their ability to demonstrate not only their leadership skills but their humanity. 

About the authors

Linda Moran Executive Consultant

Linda helps organizations with large-scale change, leadership development, executive coaching, training design and delivery, and high-performance teams.

Linda is the co-author of *Self-Directed Work Teams: The New American Challenge*; *Keeping Teams on Track: What to Do When the Going Gets Rough*; *Self-Directed Work Teams: Mastering the Challenge 2nd Edition*; and *Beyond Teams: Building the Collaborative Organization*.

She is a nationally acclaimed speaker at such conferences as the International Work Team Conference, Linkage Team conference, the American Society for Quality Control, the Association for Quality Performance, and the American Society for Training and Development (1989).

Linda holds a doctorate degree in organizational leadership and adult education from Columbia University, a master's degree in organizational communication from the University of Maryland, and a bachelor's degree from Pennsylvania State University. She became certified in Advanced

Organizational Development through Columbia University in 1996, and is listed in *The Guru's Guide* for her thought leadership on team design.

Craig Perrin Director of Product Design

Craig leads the creative team that researches, designs, writes, produces and customizes all AchieveGlobal classroom and elearning programs. Since 1986 he has been a conceptual and creative leader in the development of most of the company's flagship programs. Craig has co-authored two best-selling books: *Self-Directed Work Teams: The New American Challenge* and *Leading Teams: Mastering the New Role*. He has written numerous articles, white papers, and corporate point-of-view papers; developed award-winning elearning programs; and represented the company internationally.

As AchieveGlobal's chief video producer and writer, Craig has earned dozens of national and international awards from such organizations as SAG, AFTRA, IAAVC, ITVA, and the New York Film Festival. In 1998, Craig was named Times Mirror Editor of the Year.

Craig's background includes two years as writer and product designer with Louis Allen Associates, a management consulting firm in Palo Alto, California; six years as a stand-up trainer with the American Institute of Banking, San Francisco; ten years on the faculty of College of Marin, where he taught English, creative writing, philosophy, journalism and humanities; and five years as curator of the California Historical Society, where he developed nationally touring art and historical exhibitions.

Craig holds a BA and MA in humanities from San Francisco State University.

Chris Blauth Senior Product Manager, Leadership

Chris spearheads AchieveGlobal's efforts to develop and maintain products that will prepare leaders at all levels of an organization. He has also been involved web-based learning, launching an asynchronous web-based tool to reinforce the skills taught in AchieveGlobal's flagship sales program, *Professional Selling Skills*.

Prior to joining AchieveGlobal, Chris spent 7 years with Leica Microsystems, Inc., where he was a financial analyst and product manager.

Chris holds a B.S. in Accounting and Finance from the University at Buffalo, and an MBA in Marketing from Canisius College. He is a member of Beta Gamma Sigma Honor Society, and the American Management Association.

Appendix

To stay current with global leadership challenges, AchieveGlobal regularly conducts research into emerging business issues, as well as new leadership challenges and the skills required to meet them.

- Between December 27, 2002 and January 6, 2003, the AchieveGlobal research team conducted an on-line survey of business issues and skill sets with a random sample of business leaders in the United States. A total of 373 respondents completed the survey, of whom 125 were executive managers (e.g., vice president, C-level) while the balance represented other management ranks. The margin of error is ± 5 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level.
- Throughout November and December 2002, the AchieveGlobal research team conducted focus groups in Omaha, Nebraska; Tampa, Florida; and London, United Kingdom. The audience for each session was director-level and above. Topics included the identification and definition of key business issues and the competencies required to meet or overcome the challenges of those business issues. In total, 57 individuals participated.
- The AchieveGlobal research team conducted an on-line leadership survey October 31, 2002 through November 21, 2002 in which 747 persons responded. The survey re-assessed the presence of critical behaviors in the global workplace. The sample included a random sample of workers in the United States, a sub-sample of U.S. AchieveGlobal government/military clients, and a random sample of workers in the United Kingdom. Ninety-five (95) percent of the total sample was employed full-time (40 or more hours per week), while five percent was employed part-time (between 20 and 39 hours a week). Thirty-two (32) percent of the total sample represented an executive management position or a position of vice president to CEO. Survey results are ± 5 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level.
- In February 2002, the AchieveGlobal research team conducted an on-line survey on business issues and skill sets with U. S. subscribers to such publications as *BusinessWeek Online* and *Workforce* magazine. A total of 375 respondents completed the survey, of which 88 were executive managers (e.g., vice president, C-level) while the balance represented other management ranks. The margin of error is ± 5 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level.
- In the late 1990s, to expand upon earlier consultants' research, AchieveGlobal conducted a landmark critical incident research project across North America to refine and update the competencies associated with effective leadership. This study involved 450 organizations, representing a cross-section of industries, managers and non-managers, and nearly 2,000 individual "critical incidents." The research produced a list of 17 skills or competencies that demonstrate leadership. The research also served as a foundation for the book *Everyone A Leader*.
- Through a series of consultative engagements in the early 1990s AchieveGlobal executive consultants determined that successful leaders focus on five strategies. Those strategies developed AchieveGlobal's CLIMB model.

Reading List

Articles

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