



We-Centric LEADERSHIP

BY JUDITH E. GLASER

We are experiencing unprecedented changes in the world.

Businesses are more challenged than ever before, and it feels like there has been a sudden and profound interruption in business continuity. I call this The Edge.

At *the edge*—our moments of greatest challenge—we often feel like we are losing control and are unable to see a clear path to success. It's a crossroads we arrive at when we are faced with decisions too difficult to make, when our resources are few, and our old approaches no longer produce results that yield success. Our energy feels depleted, we discover pockets of insecurity, and we are afraid to let others in.

At the edge, we can turn away from others and try to handle the challenges from our own vantage point, or we can turn to others for help.

Old-style leadership suggests that a leader should have the answers and direct and guide the organization to solutions. Old-style leaders expect solutions to come from the top of the organization and be given to the employees for implementation. New-style leadership says that a leader doesn't have all the answers, and therefore needs to learn how to involve the entire organization in successfully coming up with the strategies for success. I call this new inclusive approach "We-Centric" Leadership.

ILLUSTRATION: EUGENE PUPAK

ASK YOURSELF: WHAT KIND OF LEADER AM I?

- 1 When you don't know what to do, do you become arrogant?
- 2 Do you always need to be the center of attention?
- 3 What does vulnerability look like to you?
- 4 When was the last time you were vulnerable and welcomed direction?
- 5 Do loved ones and co-workers tell you that you are stubborn and controlling?
- 6 When people criticize you, do you punish them for their honesty?
- 7 Do you really listen, or while others are talking do you mentally prepare how you are going to defend yourself?

GETTING TO WE

We-Centric Leaders come from diverse industries around the world. These wonderfully insightful executives realize that “we” is the most powerful ingredient for growing companies. They know how inclusive behaviors and attitudes can radically shift the power dynamics in a company, thereby positively influencing productivity and quality. We-Centric Leaders are tuned into what happens when people feel disconnected, rejected and alone. They understand that behaviors such as rebellion, resistance and conflict are often signs that the bonds of trust are broken among people and must be reconnected.

This new leadership is based on inclusivity, and this new breed of leader will no longer tolerate separateness and silos. They *instinctively* know that we do our best work when we feel connected, and thus they create ways for employees to interconnect and work synergistically. Organizations value and reward these leaders because they bring a new type of power and prosperity wherever they go. They create incredible positive changes in how work gets done, changes that shift energy in profound ways and draw out the talent and wisdom of their employees to create extraordinary business results. At the start of the 21st century, these new-style leaders are redefining the nature of organizations and are shifting the fabric of the workplace.

DON'T DERAIL YOUR TRAIN

As we rise up the corporate ladder, leaders are *required* to become more We-Centric. And as business challenges grow bigger and more complex, leaders are expected to set the tone for mutual success. We-Centric Leadership can be learned, and the key is to go beyond your own ego and live through practices of *inclusivity*.

Leaders derail, and fail to achieve inclusivity, for three reasons:

1. **Leaders who fail to build mutual relationships with others.** Those who seem to manipulate others to serve their own ends create a backlash and lose both trust and respect.

Examples:

- ▶ Leaders who exhort employees to work hard, and then take all the credit.
- ▶ Leaders who promise promotions in order to get employees to work harder and conveniently forget the promise.
- ▶ Leaders who are extremely directive and controlling, and act that way for their gain and benefit (self-importance) rather than for organizational purposes.

Sometimes, leaders become so incredibly focused on their own agendas and creating their own success that they do so at the expense of others. When it becomes clear to others that these leaders are out for their own self-interest, these leaders lose the support of the people who can help get them to their next leadership level, not to mention help them succeed.

2. Problems occur when leaders make themselves the center of attention rather than make the company the primary focus. When leaders are out solely to protect their own future, they fail to consider the organization's goals and objectives. After a while employees will see that they are not an organizational person but are out for themselves.

Examples:

- ▶ Leaders who encourage employees to hide information from other departments because it makes their department look better.
- ▶ Leaders who promote their own division's work to gain attention from the top brass, knowing it will make others look bad.
- ▶ Leaders who are constantly acting or speaking in a self-serving way publicly.

3. Leaders fail when they do not manage their own bio-reactive behaviors. We all react to emotional triggers. That is part of what makes us human. But to succeed, one needs to learn how to transform reactive behavior into proactive behavior. Without control over our own reactions, we are carriers of potentially lethal negativity and reactivity.

Examples:

- ▶ Leaders who react to conflict by avoiding it, rather than learning to deal with it properly.
- ▶ Leaders who react to fear with aggression rather than by being assertive.
- ▶ Leaders who react to power struggles by acquiescing rather than by direct confrontation.

Managing these three dynamics is the key to your success. Too often I am called in to coach senior executives who do not get along with others, are out to achieve their own agendas and are so reactive to others that they cause harm. By the time I arrive, such leaders have already created great havoc in their wake. If you learn to manage your own reactions, to put your ego behind you and to build healthy, open relationships with others, your ability to drive your organization to success will increase exponentially.

With these three principles in mind, your most important job is to establish a positive context for change by engaging employees, customers and your management team in an ongoing conversation to develop into the best company "we" can become in our industry.

We-Centric Leaders understand what they do to engage employees, and what they do to disengage employees.

THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGE

Our tools and technologies as a global community are expanding exponentially, enabling us to dissolve physical boundaries and interconnect country to country, business to business, in exciting new ways. In the face of a technology explosion, we are still faced with the more important human challenge: to dissolve boundaries, build trust and access our powerful people resources.

This new breed of leaders is willing to look inside and learn what they are made of. They commit to exploring the dynamics of their own human nature, and are willing to address the impact they have on their organization's culture. In doing so, they learn what it takes to create environments that enable employees to be fully engaged and motivated, to challenge and be challenged, and to face the difficult competitive issues together.

This new breed of leaders understands human nature. They realize that people become reactive when they feel rejected and disconnected from the conversations about corporate strategy. They realize that when people feel out of the loop they project their anxiety onto others and create more fear in the workplace. They realize that when employees feel powerless they blame other people for what is missing in their lives. When employees are rejected, they reject back.

We-Centric Leaders understand what they do to engage employees, and what they do to disengage employees. They learn to *gauge* their responses based on the results they create. The result is nothing less than a profound impact on bottom-line, top-line and organic growth. More importantly, the impact of these leaders creates a cultural atmosphere which supports an ongoing commitment and enthusiasm to achieving the company's far-reaching goals. [MW](#)

Judith E. Glaser is chief executive officer of Benchmark Communications, Inc. This article is abstracted from her new book Discovering the Power of We.