
Organizational Leadership in Gymnastics

“Leadership is the ability to use personal power to get people to do things that they might not ordinarily do. Leaders have the motivation, inclination, vision, potency and capacity required to achieve a desired goal. A leader combines knowledge, skill and energy to propel followers toward a commonly accepted vision. Leadership is not about heroic activities of mythical dimensions. Leadership is about doing whatever you can do from whatever position you occupy in your organization to make the organization and the people around you better.”

Author Unknown

Management studies have shown that supervisors spend more than 85% of their time on people issues and less than 15% of their day on the technical aspects of their jobs. Wouldn't we all like to have an organization filled with effective staff that worked together toward higher performance? An organization where people not only saw a job to be done and did it but continually searched out for ways to improve operations? We are all looking for an organization filled with leaders. The Harvard School of Business has identified 5 stages of leadership; those who have no leadership skills and only follow leaders, those who lead themselves, leaders of small groups, leaders of large groups, and those who develop leadership skills in others. It may be tempting to try and surround yourself with the first group of people who only follow your lead. Is that what you are really looking for? An organization where every direction has to come through you and no decisions made or action is taken without your approval? Personally, I do not like to have to deal with every refund request, every scheduling decision and every operational situation. I would much rather have my employees take responsibility, make decisions and leave me to work on the vision and action plans for our program. So how do you create leaders that can make good decisions and act with responsibility?

True leaders have learned not to confuse activity with productivity. Good leaders not only have developed the organizational and technical skills to be successful at what they do but also the skills to deal with many personalities to get the most out of the people around them. Great leaders realize they can't do everything themselves; that they can do more with the help of others. Most importantly, they not only lead, they develop leadership in others.

Animals behave in set patterns, which is why we are able to track and hunt them. Only man has the capacity to consciously alter his behavior to overcome routine and habit. Most people do not exercise this power. Many people prefer the comforts of routine, giving in to our nature that makes us repeat the same compulsive actions over and over again. It requires very little thought or effort and it is easier to maintain the status quo and not be bothered. Not everyone is a born leader but anyone can become a leader. It is not easy for everyone to step outside their regular patterns of behavior and take charge. There are four reasons for people to change; out of fear, out of pain, out of love or out of intent to improve their position. Understanding that, you could threaten your employees to become leaders or you can encourage them to develop skills by rewarding them. The best organizations are filled with leaders who share a vision – and love what they do. The challenge is to surround yourself with people who love what they do enough to want to raise up to a leadership role. The organization's leader then must enable and encourage decision-making, problem solving and autonomy.

To create an organization full of leaders, you must begin by being a strong leader yourself. Avoid being distracted by the minutia of life. Becoming buried in the detail is a sure-fire way of missing the point. There's a need to focus on the more important strategic issues, let the front-line worker gain the necessary knowledge and competence to develop the skills to fulfill a more rounded role, and deal with the detail. A strong leader will create a shared vision. Have a mission and let everyone around you know what that mission is. Know what you want to accomplish and develop a plan to reach those goals. Make sure the objectives are reasonably obtainable. Develop an action plan that is specific with standards that support the goals and expectations. Once you can

articulate your vision, you can find people who have a similar mission and can help you reach your goals. Gym owners typically do know how their business works best, the mechanics of the way things get done, what will work and why some things fail. Spread the knowledge! It will ensure that decision-making is informed and well thought out. The best leaders understand that they don't have all the answers; they know how to ask the right questions;

- Why do you think that's a good idea?
- What would happen if we did that?
- Who would be responsible for that?

Remember, in return, people have a right to ask leaders:

- What do you believe?
- What can I expect of YOU?
- Can I achieve MY goals by following you?
- Have you bothered to prepare yourself to lead?
- Are you ready to be ruthlessly honest?
- Can I totally trust you?
- Do you have the trust in me to let me do my job?

If you can honestly respond to these questions, you can begin to develop leadership in the people that are following you. A leader who is in tune with what is truly meaningful for him or her is able to create a more compelling vision. Effective leaders are self-aware, at least on an intuitive level. The more a leader understands himself or herself, the more he or she can tolerate negative feedback; and the more he or she becomes comfortable with not having all the answers, the greater the chance of creating an environment where subordinates are comfortable being forthright regarding their perspectives and feedback. You will be able to ask them the same questions. Hold them accountable for their personal mission. Ask yourself if you wouldn't rather have an organization of leaders that leave you free to lead your organization.

About the Author:

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“You don't have to be sick to get better.”

Michael Josephson