

Who wants to be a true Leader?



By Matthew Kwan

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Too many of us are under the illusion that people who are in leading positions are leaders. In my mind, many of them are just positional leaders and NOT true leaders at all! In many cases, these positional leaders do not even possess the basic qualities of a leader. So who are true leaders? What leadership is about? Many great authors have already written extensively on this topic. Jack Welch, former CEO of General Electric, once replied to a MBA student in a TV programme that “Leaders are those who do right things...” I would very much agree with this from a high level perspective. However, I would like to address this topic from a cost-benefit analysis angle.

Leadership, in a business context or any context, is not about the position you hold but the way you act. We are not talking about your skills and knowledge but how you would react in a given circumstance and environment. Even a fresh graduate, straight out from college and without any real work experience, can be a true leader. It is not a matter of qualifications as certificates cannot help you to become a true leader. It requires unremitting effort and willpower. In my view, all successful and respectful leaders face high opportunity costs as they need to engage in various seemingly thankless tasks in order to lead effectively. Many of them make an extra effort, taking big and difficult measures to achieve their visions, lowering themselves for the good of the whole, as well as making personal sacrifices to reach new grounds. These seemingly thankless tasks can be summed up as follows:

1. Running the extra mile

You will only ever be a follower if you are not running ahead of the game. In order to be ahead of the game, a leader needs to run not only an extra mile but to break away from the competition. Even if you break away, this does not mean your competitors won't catch you and overtake you in due course. So there is no easy way out for a leader; you just need to keep running if you want to stay in your leadership position! I always say, “You can only know what I know yesterday, but not what I will know tomorrow, as I am moving forward all the time!”



2. Seeing great visions

Leadership is about leading a team, a group, a department, or an organization. However, you can never lead without a vision. At any point in time, your vision must be clear enough to lead you in the right direction with clear outcomes; at the same time it must be shared with your team. You cannot be a true leader if your team cannot see what you see. Although it is a very difficult and sometime painful process, you do not have a choice but to share your visions.

3. Being noble

It is nearly impossible to be a great leader without integrity. Your followers will only choose to follow you if you are respectful and noble. Humility is often a condition of nobleness. It sounds very strange in our world today but it works perfectly in many ways. A noble leader, who is willing to trade off personal benefits for the sake of followers and others, will turn out be supported by his / her followers unconditionally. I guarantee you the joy of this if you dare to try!

4. Sacrificing time, money, family, relationships and life

Scientists are excellent examples of leaders that do not have positions (well, until they get recognized and rewarded!). They generally work very hard and concentrate on their fields of research while most people think they are crazy and are wasting their time. Yet they are leaders in their own fields and often they are sacrificing personal time, money, family and relationships in order to breakthrough and reach new grounds. True leaders must be prepared to sacrifice if they believe in their vision. In some extreme cases, leaders may even be prepared to sacrifice their life as their opposition is reluctant to change when their acts are damaging these people's interests!

Are you ready to be a true leader?

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