

Vision, integrity, compassion:

Three 'legs' that keep a leader standing tall

By Yvonne F. Brown

“Leadership is the art of accomplishing more than the science of management says is possible.” — Colin Powell

When you are in a leadership position, honesty and integrity are infinitely more important than the words you say. These two traits are as important to your survival as air, food, and water.

Honesty and integrity, in addition to being fundamental ethical values, are core business leadership competencies, particularly in these post-Enron, post-WorldCom days. A critical necessity for these competencies is *the tone at the top*. What is the character of the leadership team? Once this is determined, expect the organization's culture to follow suit.

Often leaders don't realize how closely they are being watched by their staff, customers and suppliers. Just about every organization sets out information on its mission, vision, and values – perhaps on its Website, perhaps in its marketing materials. These tenets drive the company's culture and set expecta-

tions that, if not followed, create an ethical gap which can cause the company to fail.

The leader's job is to set the organization's vision. Once it is established, staff must be brought into in the execution and implementation of that vision. Personal leadership and motivational leadership are the same. To lead others successfully, you must first become a role model.

Leadership is about doing what's right. Leadership is *not* about doing what's popular. Corporate results will be based on your ability to be authentic and have integrity.

Consider leadership as a three-legged stool standing on vision, integrity and compassion. Remove one leg and the whole thing topples. Let's examine each one.

Vision

As the leader, your vision paints the target. It sparks and fuels the fire



John Maxwell
Author and Leadership Expert

within the organization and draws everyone forward, and it illuminates the way others are to follow. When you create the vision, adopt a philosophy of long-term, pro-active thinking. Let everyone know how the vision will change the organization.

Having created and clarified the vision, you must market it to get a wholehearted buy-in from the people responsible for executing it. A shared vision involves everyone working together to make improvements. Without buy-in from your

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people, it cannot succeed. As a leader, you have an opportunity to create a vision for your people that enables them to bring the corporate vision to fruition.

Integrity

As a person of integrity, you have the supreme responsibility to tell the truth, to mean what you say and to say what you mean — regardless of the outcome. Do you promise your people that, if they meet a tight deadline by working overtime and weekends, you'll remember that effort during their performance evaluation — and do you then renege, perhaps using the excuse of poor profits? Your integrity just took a hit. Don't be surprised when your people no longer trust you, or refuse to go the extra mile to meet your next deadline.

When author and leadership expert John Maxwell titled his book "There's No Such Thing as Business Ethics," many were shocked. Maxwell explained that you either have ethics or you don't. There isn't one set of ethics for business and another for your personal life. There's simply ethics. There's simply integrity: truthfulness, reliability, uprightness, veracity. Maxwell also said: "There are really only two important points when it comes to ethics. The first is

a standard to follow. The second is the will to follow it."

Integrity is complete, unflinching honesty in everything you say and do. It means that you, as a leader, admit your shortcomings. It means that you work to develop your strengths and compensate for your weaknesses. Integrity means that you deal in a straightforward manner with people and situations, and that you do not compromise what you believe to be true.

Integrity means living up to one's word, delivering on promises made, alignment of beliefs and actions. Opportunities abound in the workplace for an integrity breach to occur. Consider, for just one example, how your company might respond when a salesperson exaggerates your product's capability. Do you try to skip away from what your salesperson said? Do you refund an unhappy customer's money, or devise some other satisfactory solution? And do you apologize?

Admittedly, sometimes you may have to take a hit. That's what happened in the autumn of 1982, when disaster struck Johnson & Johnson after seven people who took Tylenol died because the product was tainted. The company responded fast, distributing warnings to hospitals and sources of the drug. In addition, the company halted Tylenol production and pulled advertising. Soon a nationwide recall of Tylenol products was underway, aiming to collect some 31 million bottles in circulation that had a retail value of more than \$100 million. The result? When we might have said, "take an aspirin," we also say without hesitation, "take a Tylenol." Johnson & Johnson demonstrated its integrity, and the consumer responded with support. Today Tylenol is more successful than ever, and with bottles more difficult to open, we are secure

in the integrity of the product.

John Maxwell got it right when he said: "Integrity is all-encompassing. It's not something you demonstrate at home or church and set on a shelf at work. People of integrity don't live bifurcated lives; their morals, ethics, treatment of others and overall character are the same wherever they are, whatever they're doing."

Compassion

Many people don't realize that excellent performance in serving other people is an absolute, basic necessity for survival in today's economy. As a leader, your job is to have a vision of high standards in serving people. This is what Robert Greenleaf calls "servant leadership."

John Maxwell put it this way: "Servant-leaders never pursue a mission at the expense of their people. Rather, servant-leaders earn the loyalty and best efforts of their people by serving the interests and investing in the development of those they lead. A servant-leader leads to see others succeed."

The best leaders know that they're only as good as the people who support them. Thus it is advantageous to encourage your people to use all your resources — and theirs — to get the job done. These leaders have what Daniel Goleman calls emotional intelligence: the ability to have self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and social skills. You must have self-control, along with social and communications skills, and an ability to show empathy.

While most company structures are topped with a formal leader, functional leadership shifts from time to time, depending upon the circumstances, the needs of the group, and the skills of the players. The formal leader models the appro-

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priate behavior and helps establish positive norms. Leadership is not about telling people what to do; it's about asking people what they need. As a leader, your job is to use your influence and resources on behalf of your people to ensure their success. You must have a servant's heart.

Good leaders allow people to fail, because they realize that failure simply means you're trying something new.

They encourage employees to remove obstacles to performance improvement and find new ways to do things better. Far too often, people use only a tiny part of their abilities, yet they can blossom and thrive when given the opportunity to take the initiative.

Colin Powell said: "Effective leaders convey an unwavering firmness and consistency in their actions aligned with the picture of the future they paint.

The result: clarity of purpose, credibility of leadership, and integrity in organization."

Vision, integrity and compassion. These comprise core components of leadership. Warren Bennis notes: "Integrity is the basis of trust, which is not as much an ingredient of leadership as it is a product.

It is the one quality that cannot be acquired, but must be earned. It is given by co-workers and followers; without it the leader cannot function."

Measure your company's integrity by examining all promises and the degree to which they are honored and kept with your customers, employees and suppliers.

Regularly audit the organization's culture and improve efforts to align leadership and integrity with your mission, vision and values.

Intentionally pursue integrity and it will breed higher employee

and customer loyalty, which in turn leads to improved profitability. ❖

Yvonne F. Brown is founder of Ball of Gold Corporation (www.ballofgold.com) and president of JAD Communications International (www.jadcommunications.com). JAD helps companies improve communications and relationships, manage change and expectations, improve interpersonal skills and promote respectful communications. An international trainer, speaker, author, and coach, Yvonne focuses on helping people make bigger contributions, deal with conflict and difficult people, and refine communications to be more productive and contribute more to the bottom line. For more information contact her at Yvonne@jadcommunications.com or phone 312-953-2126.