

leadership instalments

5 Fundamentals: Taking Stock

By Dan Gaynor

“All of these principles are easy to comprehend, and all of them are damnably difficult to live and make happen. And that explains why truly great leaders are rare indeed.”

Oren Harari. The Leadership Secrets Of Colin Powell.

Harari was describing an undeniable reality that I confront in workshops every week: good leadership sounds simple and even self-evident, and yet, it is indeed quite rare. Why? Because there is a very big difference between understanding something and applying it well. So with the beginning of a new year upon us, I invite you to think about how well you are applying five key fundamentals.

1. All truly great leaders have a vision for taking their teams somewhere worthwhile. They inspire their teams with the pursuit of this vision. Do you have a clear vision for where you are taking your team? How often do you talk about it? Would your team members be able to describe it?

2. All great leaders communicate expectations clearly. After all, people can't work effectively if they don't know what you want. If asked, would your team members be able to describe what you expect of them? Do you set clear priorities?

3. In his book *Wooden On Leadership*, legendary UCLA basketball coach John Wooden wrote, “I believe effective leaders are, first and foremost, good teachers.” I couldn't agree more. When you teach you build new capacity and you demonstrate in a personal way that you have an interest in the individual you are coaching. Watch great coaches, or teachers, and you'll soon see that it's personal - they really care about the success of the individual they are working with. Teaching is what turns leaders into mentors, and followers don't like disappointing mentors, they'll work hard for a leader who is a dedicated teacher. How much time are you spending teaching? How strong are your teaching skills?

4. Now we arrive another leadership essential - a “must have” in my books - and a personal favorite - feedback. Great teams are built one person, one situation at a time, and feedback is the key. All great leaders provide lots of it, and that means both encouragement and correction. They watch the way people work (and you can't do this unless you put yourself where they are every now and then), then they encourage more of what is working, and correct practices that create problems. All their feedback is constructive - provided to



build up the receiver. The more I work with leaders on this skill, the more I see how difficult it can be to make progress. Most know they should provide more feedback, but talking about performance makes them nervous. When you have good feedback habits, followers will be able to describe what they do well and where they need to improve. They'll know because you will have talked about it, and you will have been specific. So how much feedback are you providing? How skillful is your feedback and how could you improve it?

5. Rounding out our top five, is the reality that all great leaders surface and resolve the big issues about people and the work they do. Poor leaders avoid constructive confrontation, the great ones embrace it. When someone is not getting the job done, they do something about it. They try first to correct with feedback and coaching, but when these don't solve the problem, they make a change. They end relationships that are not working. Have you been avoiding a necessary confrontation?

Discussion questions:

Just one more question this month: Discuss and rank your performance against the five fundamentals described. Which one or two offer the best opportunity for you to improve? Set a goal and write down a statement describing it.

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