

Leadership Perspective in Today's World

A. C. Macris & Larry Reiter



Introduction

News flash: It's been a very strange previous 18 months for most of us. We have been living through a global pandemic, the likes of which we've never experienced, and our hearts go out to the hundreds of thousands who did not survive it. While it's not over, we are now managing the problem and the solution, so the tunnel is shorter and the light at the end is brighter. We have witnessed political turmoil to a degree we have not recently seen and social unrest is touching every side of society. We are increasingly aware of global warming, the slow but steadily creeping malaise which if not us, our progeny must face. Unfortunately, the list can go on.

People have always had strong opinions on issues, but in today's world of instantaneous photography and communication, the distribution of an almost unlimited amount of interpretation and perspective quickly affects our whole society. You, as an individual, undoubtedly have opinions on each of these issues and others. However, as a leader in your organization, there is a duty to ensure organizational success of its mission. Leaders must retain a broad and balanced perspective in order to deal with the unprecedented and complex dynamics of today's social and business environments.

How does a leader in an organization balance one's personal beliefs and opinions with those of your staff members, and other leaders toward the goal of ongoing organizational success? This means:

- As a leader one doesn't have the personal freedoms of others. Personal beliefs and political views must be isolated from leadership responsibilities. Expounding a personal social or political agenda will have a detrimental impact on the organization.

- A high degree of self-discipline is essential to keep personal views outside the organization. A leader's goal at work is the success of the organization, not imposing one's personal views on others.
- Leaders must avoid being drawn into debates that have nothing to do with the job and workplace. Keep such debates to a minimum. Debates over social issues or political views have no place in the workplace, regardless of how well meaning the discussion is. Failure to do this can create a toxic and contentious workplace that will undermine the success of the organization and your leadership, particularly in today's culture.
- Regardless of how strong your views are, not everyone in the organization will share those views, and the workplace and your leadership effectiveness will suffer trying to impose them on your staff.

A leader must be patient with a high degree of moderation. This means not becoming victim to baiting. People who have passionate views about their beliefs are looking for validation. They will test others to see if their beliefs are similar or not. If the bait is taken a conversation can escalate, leading to major workplace tension and conflict. A leader must de-escalate these situations quickly; making it very clear that the workplace is not where such discussions are to take place. Even more, avoid being drawn into these debates. Expressing one's personal views results in either empowering those with similar views and making them more vocal and disruptive or creating tension if views are different.

Consequences of Not Separating Personal Views From the Organization

It can be very difficult to refrain from putting personal views out to the organization. Whether being baited or just being well meaning, personal views and opinions must be isolated from leadership responsibilities.

Organizational staffing consists of many different people with different views on everything. This makes organizations strong by bringing together people with different skills and views, improving the functioning of the organization. That said, personal views on politics and social, political and environmental issues need to be separate from the diverse workplace. If a leader allows political debates or debates on social, political and environmental issues to occur, the organization will self-destruct from the inside. Some people feel very strongly about these subjects. Our current



political climate shows how passionately some people feel and the vehemence that can result from political discord and rhetoric. If two people who must work closely together are on the opposite sides of a political debate, the debate will not end and the ability of those two people to work successfully together will take a major if not fatal hit. This directly impacts the functioning and success of the organization. People who are passionate can not put that passion to the side. This is where respect comes into the equation. There must be mutual respect for each person's perspective.

It becomes even more divisive when a leader takes part in such discussions. Some will feel empowered that the leader “agrees” with them and others will feel anger or even fear that their views are opposite the leader's views. Regardless of which is the case, for a given individual, it will impact their interaction with their coworkers and probably with you. This starts a downward spiral of the performance of the organization. It may be slow, but as outside events continue those threads will fester and continue to have a bigger and bigger impact.

Aspiring leaders or those who wish to improve their effectiveness must do everything possible to keep these discussions and debates out of their workplace. Make it clear that the mission of the organization is of primary concern regardless of how passionate a person is and that they must wall those feelings and opinions off from the job.

In summary, leaders must maintain a balanced perspective. They must respect that other people may have other perspectives, and they cannot fall victim to baiting. The consequences for the leader are severe and ripple through an organization. Polarization and hostilities can fester and blow up. Leaders must be proficient at defusing these situations. This involves a leader's personal behavior, policies regarding use of social media in the workplace, their use of social media, and establishing codes of conduct and expectations while in the workplace.

Preparing for Today's Leadership Challenges

Our focus is leadership in the workplace. We refer to today's world in a very proper context. We can all agree that for those of us with some mileage behind us, 2021 is certainly not 1956. Regardless of the source of one's daily dose of news, it's possible to find the news one wants to hear. In addition, the instantaneous barrage of news is mind-boggling. This phenomenon exacerbates the emotional responses. It becomes like a shark feeding frenzy. There is no balance. With deficient self-discipline things degrade very rapidly.

We've spoken about leadership attributes for years. While we define 15 leadership attributes, in the context of this article, we focus on seven:

1. Integrity,
2. Role model,
3. Consistency,
4. Professionalism,
5. Common Sense,
6. Balance, and
7. Respect

Integrity: A leader's ultimate responsibility is to the organization they lead. We selected these seven attributes because we feel these are essential in the context of today's social and business environment. In the business context maintaining a high level of integrity is always high on the attribute list. Employees respect integrity. Any behaviors that chip away at a leader's integrity diminishes leadership effectiveness and balance.

Role Model: Being a role model is extremely powerful, in both the positive and negative, as evidenced amidst much of the turmoil we see in the news. Integrity and role model attributes work hand in hand. Whether a leader wants it or not he/she becomes a role model for subordinates. This implied power and influence must be used for the best interest of the organization and to develop future effective leaders.

Consistency: We believe this to be one of the most important leadership attributes. Nothing is worse than a leader who is unpredictable and inconsistent. Amidst potential upsets, maintaining an even keel and being consistent in one's balance is essential. This can be difficult given the chaotic nature of our world today and whatever personal opinions the leader might have.

Professionalism: It should be second nature, but without professionalism nothing much else matters.



Common Sense: This should be strived for continually. There seems to be a significant level of concurrence that this is becoming lost. Unfortunately, common sense is no longer common. Take the time to think about all these attributes in the context of ensuring common sense is incorporated in one's decisions or behaviors.

Balance: Balance does not mean compromising one's values or beliefs. It means consideration for all perspectives and being the kind of leader who is unflappable and seen as one who values individuals despite their social or political beliefs. Keep in mind we are not suggesting any of these attributes are an excuse to tolerate aberrant behavior or disrespect to any person in any manner.

Respect: We keep respect for last because without respect nothing above matters. Respect each other and their right to their beliefs. But also make sure respect is mutual and between all parties. As a leader building respect as a company value, is essential; for you as a leader and between your subordinates.

Finally, while not on our list of attributes, there is the leadership competency, Emotional Intelligence (EI).

Emotional Intelligence is the ability to sense, understand and effectively apply the power and insight of emotions to facilitate high levels of collaboration and productivity. Emotional Intelligence competencies include:

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management
- Social-Awareness
- Relationship to Management

High levels of Emotional Intelligence are readily recognizable in a leader, and the opposite is absolutely true: the lack of EI is a huge deficiency for a leader.

Emotional Intelligence is a complex competency, but with some education and commitment to practicing it, higher levels are achievable. Emotional Intelligence is a skill successful leaders must possess. The difficulty is that some may have EI and others not so much. Therefore, an intense effort is necessary to develop this skill.

Conclusion

The overall point of this article is that leaders must exhibit a serious amount of self-restraint to ensure that their personal views on issues do not influence their leadership decisions and behavior.

Influencing agents abound in all forms, truth is confusing, and reactive behavior is destructive. Leaders must possess the ability to sort through it all and determine, via self-assessment and awareness, what is and is not related to the mission of the organization. Leaders must then behave in such a way that tempers potential outbursts, maintains a balance within the organization and strengthens relations between employees rather than jeopardizes it. Build an organization that demonstrates respect and a focus on the mission of the organization. Establish a standard that does not tolerate workplace debates and diatribes on political, social and environmental issues. Respect the right of individual opinions but make clear that those opinions must be kept out of the workplace. This is not easy, particularly when people are passionate about personal opinions and beliefs. Leaders cannot, nor should not, control what others think, but leaders can establish a workplace environment that requires individual opinions and beliefs be walled off from the mission of the organization where people respect others who might have different opinions and beliefs.

Always remember, leaders are role models; don't be an aberrant role model. Be that steady hand on the helm, that emotionally intelligent person who is not reactive.

M THE
MACRIS GROUP
EST. 1985

PO Box 535
Mystic, CT 06355
(860) 572-0043
www.themacrisgroup.com
acmpc@acmacris.com