

## **Authentic leadership** (A warm bath or cold shower...)

Service is manmade. Man is the most important capital of any company. Unfortunately the priority of many managers is managing instead of leadership. I am convinced that we must regard leadership and management as two different aspects just as John Kotter does.

Management and leadership are two different things. Management is made possible by the use of tools, Planning & Control, dashboards, project management programmes, quality enhancement systems et cetera. If you have all this knowhow of the management aspects you should be able to achieve your desired goals. This, however, is not possible because a crucial factor is missing, notably leadership.

Recently, I attended a lecture by professor John Kotter, currently one of the best known change gurus and author of the well known book "Our iceberg is melting". I assumed Kotter would take a closer look at his 8 steps which are part and parcel of change processes:

- create a feeling of urgency
- form a leading coalition
- develop a vision and strategy
- communicate, communicate, communicate
- remove all obstacles
- generate short term successes (and celebrate these)
- maintain high velocity and do not return to old patterns
- make the changes permanent (make it stick).

During the day he barely spent more than 15 minutes discussing these 8 steps. He focused on people instead of systems and procedures. A leader is capable of rallying people behind his cause. Five years ago I came across *servant leadership*. It turned out to be all too familiar. In retrospect I came to the conclusion that I have maintained the principles of *servant leadership* for the past 25 years. The basis here fore was laid by the Marriott concern.

One could speak of 'a warm bath' (and not only in the hotel rooms). Employees felt safe and comfortable and worked with pleasure and enthusiasm. I now realise that the Marriott family had not read a book on HRM titled *How to motivate people* but that their faith was the founding principle. They were Mormons.

The concept was simple: We will treat our people, guests and suppliers with care (do not do unto another what you would not do unto yourself). I truly believe in these principles. If we apply these

principles to employees than the leadership style will be decisive when it comes to results. You cannot apply Lean Six-Sigma without support and involvement. The road to operational excellence is through the employees.

Besides the John Kotter lectures I also attended 9 classes at Nijenrode University dealing with authentic leadership (Focus Conferences). I regard the classes as an invaluable investment in my vision of management and leadership.

If we want to attract and keep employees we must manage them differently. What I mean to say is that we must start leading with our heart and senses and not just our head. It must feel good and be right. The most important thing herein is the exemplary position of the leader. You cannot successfully accomplish cut backs if you are not willing to make sacrifices yourself. You cannot educate your staff about customer courtesy if you park your own car in the best parking spots, notably signposted CEO ONLY. You cannot enjoy privileges if your staff does not.

### **Customer satisfaction**

The effect of good leadership will automatically reflect in greater customer satisfaction. This is a great stimulus and – with direct feedback and pronunciation of approval – creates an upward spiral, is a people motivator, sick leave reducer and basically more fun. To keep directing from a management point of view will lead to a 'cold shower' and a mediocre unsatisfying result.

To conclude: Leadership is not a hype but a trend. Recently, John Kotter's colleague Bill George, professor at Harvard University and author of 'True North' (over 125.000 copies sold- in dutch: Vaar je eigen koers ) asked a question on LinkedIn about authentic CEO's. He received more than 1500 replies. People such as Kotter, George, Gobillot and Jan Gunnarsson are the trendsetters when it comes to a vision of leadership. Robert Greenleaf's vision is still viable decades later. Prominent people in the Netherlands, besides the speakers at Nijenrode University (Focus Conferences), are Tjep Maris, Daan Fousert, Alexander de Vries (Hostmanship.nl). I can also name Mathieu Weggeman and Edwin de Beukelaar. Inspiration is abundant. My advise would be: spend less time reading management books and more time in developing yourself and developing authentic leadership. It will enrich your life and I almost dare to say 'read my lips' when it comes to the following statement:

**Companies and organizations which do not change their management soon and see that leadership shall have to prevail will have tough times ahead.**

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