



THREE QUESTIONS ALL GREAT LEADERS MUST ASK!

By Tom Van Wie

It's not enough to BE IN a leadership position. You must challenge yourself to BE a leader who inspires!

I'm going to ask you to please do me a favor and just pause for a moment. Pause and reflect upon the timeline of your career that brought you to THIS very moment. The moment you are in as you read this. It doesn't matter if you are a CEO, CMO, Human Resources VP, Senior Manager, Coordinator, or Assistant. Stop and think about the person or people who have inspired your journey. Those whose leadership shifted your perception of the workplace and transformed how you engage in the daily activities of your profession.

OKAY...YOU'RE THINKING...I CAN FEEL IT! GREAT!

I hope that was an inspiring moment for you as you summoned that visual, recalled that person, and remembered that experience. Taking the brief but profoundly important time to realize that what he or she did and said, the decisions they made, the conflict they managed...all had an impact on your personal and professional life. That inner feeling is most rewarding. The question then becomes, "What next?" or "What do I do with this information?" The obvious answer - PAY IT FORWARD! Here's why....

Wouldn't it be great to know that someday, and in some way, YOU will have that impact on somebody? When they are asked to do this very same exercise, YOU will be the person first and foremost in their mind. It should be understood that you not only have the ability to exercise this level of influence in someone's life and career but, as a true leader, it is your responsibility to do so.

It can stand as measurement of how effective you are and have been in your role. And as an HR professional, the purpose becomes two-fold and even more important. Not only does the influence of your leadership extend to your immediate HR team, but also the essential and integral role you play in sourcing and staffing every area of your company.

Before going any further, let's dispel two misguided beliefs at the onset. First, one who is to be considered a "leader" is not identified by job title. Leadership is a quality demonstrated by attitude. A true leader at any level or stage of their career embraces optimism, communicates with motivation, and shares respect with everyone who's part of a functioning team.

The second belief that needs certain clarification is fearless use of the word "serve." To be a true leader means TO SERVE and not to SELF-SERVE. Through vision and action, you serve your professional peers, partners, direct reports or any other person within the structure upon which your organizational culture is built.

The success or failure of any brand begins within its own four walls. The internal culture of an organization serves as the very foundation upon which a brand's values and attributes are determined, crafted, created, and disseminated to the world at large. Brands are brought to life by PEOPLE. Those who come to work every day and make the magic happen. The sorcerers who conjure that magic are it's leaders.

And when one chooses to lead by inspiring others to do their best work - incredible things happen! Inspiration can manifest in different ways but there are simply no exceptions to this rule. Sure, we could pull HR white-papers. We could look at case studies showcasing Oprah Winfrey and Mark Zuckerberg.

But for that we have the WORLD WIDE WEB. In my experience, true leadership can be identified and nurtured by asking three questions of yourself and peers as often as necessary. To do so is vital to professional success and the success of a business.

1. Do I possess a solid vision for success and is it clearly communicated? A vision for success could apply to a one-year plan, a five-year plan, a creative strategy, or an SOP document. The details are not important so much as your ability to generate that idea and vision, hold yourself primarily responsible, clearly communicate that vision to your team (or teammates), build consensus, and organize a plan for shared accountability.
2. Do I connect with every member of my team? Leaders cultivate team structures and are committed to collective success. They value every person and have a working knowledge of each person's role and contribution. They are proactive in providing timely guidance as needed and support when obstacles and challenges present themselves. Most importantly, leaders reward strengths and encourage development in areas where it is needed.
3. Am I open to learning from learners? Those who seem to know it all often prove that they know very little. Is your brand, business, or department struggling? If so, this is a question that seriously needs to be asked. Leaders are open to ideas, suggestions, and new ways of looking at circumstances - without judgement - from EVERYONE at EVERY LEVEL. They don't profess to know how to do it all but are definitely skilled in building a team that does, and they trust in the abilities of those they've put in place!

Simplistic as these three questions may seem, the honest answers can serve as an extremely valuable tool to an HR Professional who so masterfully communicates with a myriad of different personalities on a daily basis. The honest answers revealed may offer some insight into issues your organization may be experiencing in moving efforts forward. They may also shed light on already existing strengths which only need to be amplified. And in either case, it creates a very clear path of actionable communication!

I'll close on a personally relevant story. I began my career in television at the Lifetime cable network. In those days it was undeniably deemed "Television for Women."

The brand vision established and communicated by then CEO, Carole Black, was pervasive in every area and at every level of the network. In return, it was embraced by EVERYONE on the 500 person team and executed with passion and commitment. She walked the halls regularly and knew EVERYBODY by name.

As we began our rise from the #7 network to the #1 network in cable, she held a celebratory ice cream gathering when we officially reached the #2 spot in prime time. She greeted every team member arriving to the social as they exited the elevator with an unparalleled level of excitement. She took the time to congratulate

and thank each and every one of us! You could hear her jubilation hallways away. And to this day that is the moment that always comes to mind when I pause for a moment and reflect on the leaders who have inspired me!

What leaders have impacted your life personally or professionally? How did they inspire you? Are you ready to be in a leadership role or be a leader who inspires?

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