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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to capture the behaviors of
leaders of learning organizations and from those behaviors to
outline how to lead learning. Leading learning requires
modeling, mentoring, managing, and monitoring learning. We
believe that these are the most powerful ways that leaders can
influence the behavior of people in their organizations. Leading
learning provides a very different perspective on leadership than
the styles theory so popular in years past and transformational
leadership that currently is in vogue. In order to learn these
behaviors, leaders and followers must unlearn much of what they
have believed to be true about leadership.

LEADING LEARNING

1993 was a very good year for The Associates Corporation of
North America, the nineteenth consecutive year of increased
earnings, growing to total assets of $30 billion. In large part,
1993 was successful because of the contributions of the Consumer
Financial Services Division of The Associates, a confederation of
consumer lending businesses with branches throughout the U.S. To
recognize the successful efforts of the branch managers, a gala
year-end meeting was held in Dallas. Along with the awards
banquets, entertainment and recreational activities, managers and
their spouses also were presented with some learning
opportunities. Workshops on marketing, managing diversity,
benefits and managing relationships were provided. At many
company meetings such as this, especially where spouses are
included, attendance at workshops is often sparse at best. This
is not the case at The Associates, where the workshops are
packed, people take notes and informal discussions carry topics
far beyond the allotted time. There is a genuine and visible
involvement in learning.

One reason employees at The Associates are so involved in
learning can be found in the behavior of a workshop attendee,
Reece A. Overcash, Jr., the 68 year old chairman and chief
executive officer of The Associates. The leader of learning at
The Associates, Overcash is adamant about the need for continual
learning. He is fond of quoting G.E.'s Jack Welch, "Are you
regenerating? Are you dealing with new things? When you find

yourself in a new environment, do you come up with a fundamentally different approach? That's the test. When you flunk, you leave." Overcash's commitment to learning goes far beyond talking about learning. He leads learning at The Associates in direct and tangible ways. He is a model for learning. Overcash has a seemingly insatiable appetite for new ideas and perspectives. He willingly and frequently puts himself in the role of student and prods other managers to do likewise. At the consumer lenders' meeting he attended workshops, took notes, asked questions--he set an example. Overcash is a revered mentor; he is constantly teaching. Asking questions, sparking interactions, he seems always to be working toward creating a learning environment. Keith Hughes, president and chief operating officer of The Associates, and heir apparent to the top spot upon Overcash's retirement, talks about his relationship with Overcash as a "tutorial in how to be a CEO." Like Hughes, every executive in The Associates hierarchy can point to lessons they've learned from Overcash.

Overcash's leadership of learning at The Associates is not as casual as it may seem. His modeling is personal, but purposeful as well. His mentoring follows an agenda. In short, he manages learning at The Associates. Management of learning is seen in the assignment of tasks and responsibilities, the rotation of key individuals through challenging assignments, the use of every opportunity to urge one Group or Division within the company to look at what another Group is doing and learn from their experience.

Finally, Overcash leads learning by <u>monitoring</u> the learning going on at The Associates. Like most successful CEOs, Overcash knows the numbers of each of The Associates' businesses backwards and forwards. It is not uncommon for Overcash to ask a Division vice-president a question about some small detail of his operation. He closely tracks new programs and new pursuits at The Associates, measuring them against their plan and their potential. Beyond the numbers and new ventures Overcash monitors relationships. It is his belief that the lending business is a relationship business. On vacations, it is his practice to stop in at branches, greet people by name, ask them about themselves, their business, and what they have learned. Overcash does not micro-manage, but instead builds close relationships that help him understand all facets of the business.[1]

As the pace of change in the business world has accelerated, it is apparent that yesterday's accomplishments and even today's successes are no guarantees of tomorrow's success. What managers have known to work in the past, uderstood to be true or thought to solve problems is called into question as business conditions differ from one day to the next. Change, the modern-day manager's mantra, has in recent years proven to be an inadequate response. A decade and one-half of the pursuit of change has left many organizations scarcely better equipped to deal with their dynamic competitive environments than if they had never changed at all. Smarter organizations learn <u>to</u> change and learn <u>from</u> change.[2] Smart organizations actively manage the learning process to ensure that it occurs by design rather than by chance. Smarter

organizations are learning organizations, able to process their experiences--with customers, competitors, partners and suppliers--in ways that allow them to create environments in which they can be successful. Learning is their sustainable competitive advantage, leadership makes learning happen.

The purpose of this paper is to capture the behaviors of leaders of learning organizations and from those behaviors to outline how to lead learning. Leading learning requires modeling, mentoring, managing, and monitoring learning. We believe that these are the most powerful ways that leaders can influence the behavior of people in their organizations. Leading learning provides a very different perspective on leadership than the styles theory so popular in years past and transformational leadership that currently is in vogue. In order to learn these behaviors, leaders and followers must unlearn much of what they have believed to be true about leadership.

Leaders Model Learning

One of the most powerful dynamics at work in leadership is what Arnold Toynbee called "mimisis", literally the process by which people mimic their leaders. When employees look to leaders, however, they often see little change or learning modeled. Those who have reached positions of influence <u>argue</u> the need for individual and organizational learning in the face of increasing turbulent environmental conditions. These same leaders often <u>act</u> as though their experiences from the past will be an adequate guide. Reflecting in 1987 on his handling of early crises at Apple--the departure of Steve Jobs, 20% layoffs,

a drop in stock price, bad press--John Sculley described how he responded, "Well, I found it most useful to be able to fall back on things that I already understood, to define problems in such a way that would let me use solutions that I already had some experience with."[3] At the same time that Sculley was trying to convince Apple employees that events in the personal computer industry required that they needed dramatically different understandings and actions, Sculley himself was drawing upon a repertoire anchored in his own experience at PepsiCo--acting to establish control, eliminate chaos, to maintain distance, in short, to bring the lessons of professional management to Apple.

Many managers view it as their job to be a model for learning. G.E.'s Jack Welch says, "My job is to listen to, search for, think of and spread ideas, to expose people to good ideas and role models. I'm almost a maitre 'd, getting the crowd to come sit at this table: "Enjoy the food here. Try it. See if it tastes good. And they do."[4]

Leaders of learning recognize the importance of reflecting on their own experience and the need to periodically retreat from the pace of their office to engage in self-renewal so that they might return re-energized and better able to be a catalyst for others. The notion of renewal or reinvention characterizes the leaders of learning organizations who hold themselves to the same standard that they hold their organizations--"Are you regenerating?"

Leaders Mentor Learning

The most effective leaders of learning not only inspire others by their example, they also take a personal interest in the learning of others; they serve as mentors. Borrowing from Greek legend and lexicon where Homer's "faithful and wise" mentor advised Odysseus and was entrusted with the education of Telemachus, mentor has been broadly used to describe the teachers, guides, coaches, helpers, et. al. who contribute to an individual's development. Where learning is concerned, the mentoring behaviors of leaders are quite specific: (1) they set learning agendas, targeting particular kinds of learning; (2) they create a learning environment with challenging assignments, assignments in which there is a great deal to be learned, assignments which entail risk-taking; (3) they help process the learning experience, they debrief what was learned and how it was learned.

The nature of the mentor relationship--interpersonal and intimate--and the dynamics of the mentoring process--intentional and involved--are such that leaders must be very selective in who they choose to mentor. Leaders set an example for the rest of the organization about the value of mentoring. James E. Burke, former chairman and CEO of Johnson & Johnson, often retells of being mentored early in his career. Six years after Burke went to work for Johnson & Johnson in 1949, he was named director of new products. Burke recalls that in those days coming up with new products wasn't the science that it is today. "We found that only three out of ten new products which reached the marketplace succeeded." Among Burke's early new products was a children's

chest rub promoted as safer and easier to use than those already on the market. The chest rub was designed like today's stick deodorants. It failed, along with new nose drops and cough medicine, and Burke was told to report to the chairman's office. At that time, Robert Wood Johnson, "the General", son of the founder, was chairman of Johnson & Johnson. "I was certain that I was going to be fired. I decided to defend myself and was mentally prepared for a good fight. The chairman said to me, 'I understand that your product failed.' I said, 'Yes, sir, that's true.' Picking up a piece of blue paper, he said, 'Furthermore, I understand it cost this corporation $865,000.' I said, "Yes, sir, that's right.' He stood up, held out his hand and said, 'I just wanted to congratulate you. Nothing happens unless people are willing to make decisions, and you can't make decisions without making mistakes.'"

Burke recalls, "It was during that period that I began to understand the necessity for risk and the realization that you can't grow without it. You simply have to create an environment that encourages risk taking."[5] Mentored by Johnson in the lessons of risk-taking, it is not surprising that when Burke became CEO he passed these same lessons on to his own protégé, Ralph S. Larsen, who took over the reins from Burke. Asked what he had learned from Burke, Larsen responded, "Jim has created a culture based on intelligent risk-taking, on not being afraid to fail, on getting everything on the table and arguing if you have to. I love it--it works."[6]

Through active and purposeful mentoring, leaders enhance the learning of others, helping them to develop their own initiative, strengthening them in the use of their own judgment, and enabling them to grow and to become better contributors to the organization. These learners, by virtue of their learning, then become leaders and mentor to others. In the most effective learning organizations, everyone feels as though they have a mentor and everyone, in turn, mentors. It starts at the top.

Leaders Manage Learning

Leaders in learning organizations must do more than set a good example and be a mentor. If the message of learning is to permeate the organization, leaders must also manage learning. Managing learning means leaders must continually focus attention on the learning agenda and institutionalize the learning process.

Employees respond to what leaders attend to and reward. At DuPont, the entire organization became safety conscious when lost-time accidents were written up and given to the chairman daily. At Dell Computer Corporation, customer complaints that aren't fixed in a week go directly to the CEO, Michael S. Dell. This attention assures that employees understand Dell's vision that every customer "must have a quality experience and must be pleased, not just satisfied." When leaders focus attention on the learning agenda, employees respond.

At Home Depot, learning sustains their competitive advantage. The dramatic success of Home Depot is due to the training employees receive, training designed and delivered by the leader and CEO, Bernard Marcus. Home Depot's sale staff can

offer on-the-spot lessons in tile-laying, electrical installations, and other projects. New hires, who are often experienced electricians or carpenters, start with five days of classes that include lessons on everything from company history to how to greet a customer. After class, new staffers spend three weeks tethered to a department manager learning how to order, stock, and sell. Employees then learn about the rest of the store, which stocks some 30,000 items of hardware, lumber, tools, lighting, and plumbing supplies. Salespeople regularly attend seminars on paint, tile, and other merchandise that help them answer customer questions. Nonstop questions from customers are what anyone wearing an orange Home Depot apron can expect. To see to it that they have the answers, the company focuses on non-stop learning.[7]

One way for leaders to effectively and continuously focus attention on learning is to institutionalize the organization's commitment to learning. It is ironic that faced with a dramatic and dynamic environment that demands change, many managers choose to cut back on the very educational programs that might better prepare their employees to learn. Training and management development programs are often early targets for cost cutting. Such moves may speak ill of a company's commitment to learning, but they might just as well reflect the perceived connection (or lack thereof) between training and development and learning. In learning organizations, both the commitment to learning and the connection are clear.

Since its inception in 1956, G.E. Crotonville, G.E.'s Management Development Institute has been used as a direct lever for change. When Jack Welch began to transform G.E. in 1981, he told then Crotonville manager, James Baughman, "I want a revolution to start at Crotonville. I want it to be part of the glue that holds G.E. together." Today Welch uses Crotonville to touch every part of G.E. Since 1989 the energies of Crotonville have been directed toward involving nearly 40,000 G.E. middle-managers in learning the work-out/re-engineering process.[8] Re-engineering and workout programs are learning processes particularly applicable to administrative, operating, and human resource systems. By institutionalizing workout in the Crotonville curriculum, Welch has assured that the learning will go on long after managers have left the Crotonville campus.

At Hitachi, the Japanese electronics giant, there can be no mistaking leadership's commitment to learning. Years ago, Hitachi founded the Institute of Management Development, the first in-house institute created in Japan for management education. To maintain Hitachi's traditions, approximately 70 percent of the instructors at the institute are Hitachi employees. Education is provided for all levels of employees, from recruits to top-level managers.

Programs offered by the institutes last 1 to 2 weeks and host groups of 16 to 20 employees. All institutes share five objectives for their courses. The first objective is to give managers a clear understanding of Hitachi's management concepts. Managers must understand the company's three maxims--harmony,

sincerity, and pioneering spirit--and recognize that the customer comes first. Managers must also be able to lead and develop the employees under them.

The second objective is to acquire an entrepreneurial spirit and innovative thinking since Hitachi relies on creative products to stay ahead of its competition. Managers must grasp the difference between being a "technology-oriented" business and a "marketing-oriented" industry.

The third objective is to give managers a broad awareness of the world in order to aid Hitachi's international businesses. Politics, culture, religion, as well as international economics are in the curriculum. This knowledge helps Hitachi conduct harmonious business activities in the global market place.

The fourth objective is to unify managers' opinions and sense of direction in order to maintain a common, cohesive outlook. This is especially important for Hitachi since a large number of its group companies and subsidiaries are encouraged to be independent. The intricate web of financial, manufacturing, and distribution relationships make it imperative that relationships be strong. Finally, the fifth objective is to improve overall business skills: management, marketing, financial management, human resource management, and so on.

To meet the needs of management in a variety of fields, Hitachi's programs are diverse. But some common threads run through all the courses. For example, company executives are available during the courses to engage in dialogue with the managers. The president attends any course for department

managers and above, and the vice presidents attend courses for section managers. Occasionally, presidents of some of Hitachi group companies serve as instructors. All courses have some of the board officers in attendance as well. Hitachi believes that people make business and that to respect, develop, and make the most of each individual is the road to success.[9]

Leaders Monitor Learning

Many fine ideas go unrealized in organizations because no one feels personally responsible for seeing to it that platitudes and pledges are translated into performance and rewards. Managers who are serious about leading learning in their organizations monitor learning and in so doing, make learning everyone's responsibility. Unfortunately, it is not as easy to monitor learning as it is to track production or sales. A leader cannot simply call up on a computer screen the monthly learning figures the way he or she might access production numbers or sales or any one of a number of important financial indicators. To date there is no Lotus I, II, III, or Windows program for learning. Learning is difficult to monitor because learning is a process, not a product. As such, measurement must be at once more immediate and more intimate. The process must be assessed as it is delivered by those involved. Monitoring organization learning must be built-in to the organization's learning. There are two leader behaviors that result in effective monitoring and simultaneously promote learning: (1) leaders establish routines for receiving undistorted feedback; (2) leaders encourage new failures.

Without feedback there can be no learning. It is feedback
that allows us to adjust our behavior to better attain our goals.
In modern organizations, feedback is plentiful, but it is often
difficult to get the truth. One significant measure of a
learning organization is how much truth the leader hears. There
are several dynamics at work in organizations that act to distort
feedback to leaders and therefore, frustrate learning. First,
over time there is a tendency for everyone in an organization--
especially those at the top, to look alike and think alike. This
contributes to "groupthink" where fitting in and gaining the
leader's approval becomes more important than making a meaningful
difference. When Ed Whitacre took over as CEO at Southwestern
Bell Corporation he remarked that a habit SBC needed to break was
having everyone "molded into our very image."[10] Learning
organizations value the contribution diversity can make to
undistorted feedback. Bill Kaufman, manager of New Areas for
Oryx Energy Company, comments on the composition of his group, "I
like to have the lawyer and the marketing guy involved, they
bring a different perspective. We're dealing in some parts of
the world (Kazikstan) where 'business as usual just isn't going
to cut it'. The rest of us have been together for a long time
and we've been doing what we're doing for a long time. We need
somebody to challenge our thinking."[11]

These remarks suggest the second organizational impediment
to undistorted feedback. Many leaders will not harbor dissent,
choosing instead to 'shoot the messenger'. The legendary movie-
maker, Samuel Goldwyn, presented his key advisors with an

unenviable choice when, after a succession of box-office bombs, he called them together and demanded, "I want you to tell me exactly what's wrong with me and MGM, even if it means losing your job."[12] Many a manager has been faced with the same dilemma--tell the boss what's wrong and risk being fired, or don't tell and risk being fired because what's wrong doesn't get fixed! Leaders in learning organizations encourage dissent, recognizing that dissent promotes learning by forcing people to look at a wider range of possibilities. Some learning leaders even go so far as to structure dissent into the decision-making process and to reward dissenters.

Six months after Apple chairman John Sculley gave the Newton project the go-ahead, Donna Auguste was named software engineering manager. She joined an insulated group. "There weren't any people who didn't already know people on the Newton team when they joined the group. I didn't think it was healthy." Auguste set out to increase the diversity and dissent in the Newton group. She began hiring engineers from outside the small circle, bringing in blacks and women in the process. She refined the interviewing process to reach beyond the usual applicants, and looked much farther afield than Apple typically does. With this diversity came dissent which Auguste did not try to smooth away; she used dissent to move the project forward. One of the Newton designers who worked with Auguste recalls, "She was a lousy diplomat. But this is obviously preferable to the inverse approach that is taken by most managers. They'd much rather think everybody likes them than actually get aything done." When

leaders <u>use</u> diversity and dissent the group learns and things get done.[13]

Some learning organizations have instituted routines for systematically debriefing their management practices. The concept of upward evaluation or 360-degree feedback has become popular in some of America's most admired companies as a mechanism for debriefing employees' experience and giving feedback to leadership. Alcoa, Burlington, General Mills, Hewlett-Packard, Herman Miller, Whirlpool, British Petroleum, 3M, and UPS are all companies that use upward and lateral evaluations along with more traditional downward performance appraisals. The learning potential is tremendous. At UPS the company learned that its 35,000 managers were not doing a satisfactory job of helping workers to develop their technical and communication skills. Only 48% of workers gave their managers satisfactory marks on employee development. Having learned, UPS is now acting to improve the teaching skills of its managers.[14] At Hoechst Celanese Corporation, a key component of the Middle Management Leadership Program is "Leadership Feedback". Managers are presented with 360 degree feedback elicited from their boss, their peers, and their subordinates. Reviewing this feedback, they develop action plans for improving their own leadership. These action plans are tracked for the individuals and also used as input into curriculum development for future leadership programs. The individual leaders learn from the 360 degree feedback and the organization learns. This kind of learning is

possible only because leaders are willing to debrief their own behavior.

Leaders can effectively monitor learning by noting the diversity, dissent, and debriefings present in their own organizations. More of each means, in all probability, more learning. The same is true of failures. The more you have, the more you can learn.

One company that has had a difficult time learning from its failures in recent years is Eastman Kodak Company. Early in the 1970s Kodak management decided that the future of silver halide technology, the proprietary film coating on which Kodak was founded, was limited. A twenty-year period of mostly failed experiments ensued. Then there was Kodak's entry into instant photography in 1976. This was done by stealing Polaroid's technology. The result: heavy losses, a fine of $900 million paid to Polaroid in 1991 and a tarnished reputation. That debacle was followed by Kodak's entry into reprographics. Kodak's first copying machine was far better than anything Xerox had at the time. But Kodak failed to exploit its competitive advantage, and Xerox regained the edge. In 1991 and 1992 Kodak lost money on its $4 billion (revenues) copier and information systems business.

During the 1980s Kodak set itself up as a venture capitalist for a number of new technologies. Most did not pay off. It purchased a number of publishing and prepublishing companies. For example, Atex was the premier copy processing system for the publishing industry when Kodak bought the company in 1981.

Atex's founders, stifled by Kodak, left; and, ten years later Kodak sold Atex. A larger failure by far was Kodak's entry into pharmaceuticals.

Failing to learn the lessons of prior experiences, Kodak purchased Sterling Drug in 1988 for $5.1 billion. Kodak reasoned that its extensive background and knowledge of different chemical-based lab processes would instantly make it a formidable player in the profitable pharmaceutical industry. Because Kodak's blood analyzer, diagnostic equipment, chemical substrates and film products were already widely used in medical laboratories, its managers thought that Sterling would provide them with an easy entry into a new industry that would not face the same kind of intense competitive pressures that characterized the photographic film industry. Unfortunately, these expectations never materialized. The ability to leverage technologies used in films and imaging did not fit well with the skills required for smooth integration and mastery of the pharmaceutical industry. Kodak eventually placed a major part of its Sterling Drug acquisition into a joint venture with French pharmaceutical giant Sanofi.

Analysts suggest that Kodak's repeated failures have been the result of its own ponderous bureaucracy and the fact that it had neither the skill to manage entrepreneurial companies nor the willingness to admit its own managerial shortcomings. Much of this failure to learn has been laid at the feet of Kodak's CEOs over the last 20 years, all veterans of the Rochester corporate bureaucracy.

George Fisher, of Motorola, has brought new perspectives to Kodak. Instead of seeking external diversification opportunities, Kodak has refocused its efforts to build a strong presence in new, digital-imaging technologies. Now wary of how peripheral businesses can distract the company from its core imaging businesses, Kodak is investing in new products and strategic alliances to extend and renew its imaging-based competencies.[15]

The relevant criticism of Kodak is not that they made mistakes, but that they initally failed to learn from the mistakes they made. Of course, leaders of learning don't actually encourage failures. What they do is encourage experiments by making it clear that it is okay to fail. In most organizations, the costs of failure are so high (often career-ending) that whatever cheerleading managers do on behalf of creativity and risk-taking is not enough to turn employees from the safe and narrow path of making no mistakes. To thwart this inherent conservatism, leaders must often go to the other extreme of seeming to celebrate failures. Ralph C. Stayer, CEO of Johnsonville Foods, used mistakes to stimulate learning. "Mistakes are road signs along the journey which read 'Learning opportunity ahead'. Mistakes are the servomechanisms of life. I used to fight or fear them. When I learned to use them to trigger my own learning, both I and my company made progress. I even formed a 'Mistake of the Month Club' to stimulate discussions about mistakes made and learning from them. I offered a 'Shot in the Foot Award' for the person who made the

biggest mistake from which he/she learned the most. It was a coffee cup cast in the form of a foot with a hole in it. I was determined to have individuals see mistakes as an opportunity to learn and try again, not as an act against God's law."[16]

Conditions for Leading Learning

Modeling, mentoring, managing and monitoring are key leader behaviors that promote learning. Here we've described these behaviors as exercised primarily by CEOs, people who have both the position and often the personae of leaders. But nothing about these behaviors makes them the province of members of the executive suite. These leaders may be more visible, but their examples are no more viable than modeling, mentoring, managing and monitoring done by others elsewhere in the organization. People at every level of an organization have opportunities to model learning, to mentor others' learning, to manage learning and to monitor learning. In the most effective learning organizations, everyone acts as a learning leader because everyone is learning.

This is not to suggest that these behaviors are easily come by. Leading learning at any level is a challenging task made all the more so because it is an ongoing process. Today it is common to talk of the leadership challenges presented by crises and dramatic changes, where organizations and individuals need to be 'transformed'. Leadership may actually be easier in these critical times because the need for change is so obvious and people are looking for lessons to learn.

In 1991, Lawrence Bossidy left his position as vice chairman at G.E. to take over the helm of Allied Signal, the then troubled $12-billion-a-year manufacturer of aerospace equipment and auto parts. "The transformation here has been easier than at G.E. because the people of Allied Signal obviously were on a burning platform and they knew from newspaper reports about the struggles of IBM and Sears. They knew Allied Signal would have to be succesful to provide them with job security and opportunities."[17] So much of leadership has come to be associated with fire-fighting that some see the role of a leader as creating, if not crisis, at least the awareness of crisis. Bossidy believes, "To inaugurate large-scale change, you may have to create the burning platform. You have to give people a reason to do something differently."

Crises certainly provide an arena for leadership and can test the mettle of any leader. But, in a learning organization, the appropriate measure of leadership is how much learning is going on when things are going well. As difficult as it may be to teach smart people how to learn, it is still more difficult for successful organizations to learn when the platform is not burning.

Ernesto Martens-Rebolledo is the CEO of Vitro, Sociedad Anonima, an 84 year old Mexican company with over $3 billion in sales and 44,000 employees. One of the largest and most successful of Mexican companies, Vitro, through its subsidiaries, like Anchor Glass Container Corporation, and joint ventures with Ford, Corning, Samsonite and Whirlpool, manufactures everything

from glass bottles to washing machines. Martens became Vitro's first non-family CEO in 1985. He sees the major challenge before his company now as, "One of the most difficult things to do in a successful company is to convince people that they must change." He describes specifically the need to change the mind-set of managers from one of complacency to one of continuous improvement. "The most difficult and probably the most crucial thing we needed to do was change the mind-set of the managers, which is next to impossible to do in a successful company."[18]

In Martens' view the problem leaders face is less one of motivation--traditional leadership--than it is one of changing the way the organization reflects upon its own experience-- learning. Leaders must help their organization find learning from the commonplace as well as from the critical, from the failures as well as from the successes, and especially from those moments when it seems as though there is nothing to be learned.

Unlearning Leadership

In what ways are modeling learning, mentoring learning, managing and monitoring learning different from the kinds of behaviors that leaders typically do? Leading an organization toward learning poses a fundamentally different way of thinking about leadership. It is more concerned with process than with product, aiming more toward commitment and creativity than compliance, intending not to prove, but to improve. The leader as learner and the responsibility of leading an organization's learning mandate new ways of thinking about a leader's role. In order to assume this perspective, leaders and those who would be

leaders need to disabuse themselves of certain widely held
notions about leadership.

It is popular today to speak of the role of the leader as
though <u>what the leader does</u>--leader behaviors--can be separated
from <u>who the leader is</u>--the leader as a person. Most
contemporary views of leadership are based upon identifying
certain leader behaviors that are appropriate for certain
situations. The popular "Leadership Styles," " Situational
Leadership," and "Transactional" approaches of recent years are
typical of this view. In each, aspiring leaders are taught how
to diagnose organizational situations and how to draw from their
repertoire the indicated leader actions. Viewed in this way
leadership is purely an instrumental activity, a study in means.
Leaders, thus trained, are not much concerned about modeling
behavior. They do not see the way they lead as a reflection of
who they are--it is simply a tool they use, a role that they play
to achieve specific results. These leaders often are blind to
the impact of their own behavior on others and ignorant of how
discongruity between their actions and their words may detract
from their leadership.

Learning leaders take a more holistic view of leadership.
They understand that learning is not just something a person
does, it is the way a person is. Leading learning is not a role
one plays, it is the way one looks at oneself and the way one
processes one's organizational experience. Given this
perspective, learning leaders recognize the importance of
modeling. They attach much greater importance to congruity

between who they are and what they do as perceived by others. They lead learning in large part by learning, not by telling others they <u>need</u> to learn, but by showing in their own behavior the value of learning.

Many leaders today pride themselves on their personal detachment. They argue that tough times demand tough people who are able to set aside their personal agendas in favor of fact-finding, objective analysis and decision-making. We believe that learning occurs through <u>relational activities</u>. The effectiveness of learning and of leading learning is, in large part, a function of the effectiveness of the leader's relationships with others in the organization. No where is this more apparent than in mentoring. Mentor/protégé relationships are intensely personal. Who leaders mentor and how they mentor them are choices that have profound effects on learning for individuals and for the organization. Leaders who are "distant" in an effort to be detached and objective diminish the learning possibilities that could come from their own personal immersion in the process. Many leaders, though distant, are able by virtue of their personality to evoke an emotional attachment from followers. These charismatic leaders remain detached. They may be the object of a relationship, but they are not involved in the way that leading learning requires.

The personal involvement of the leader serves several learning agendas. It makes the model of learning that the leader presents richer and more reachable for others. The relationships that develop become an important source of honest and thoughtful

feedback. The leader's personal involvement with others in learning opens him or her to learning _from_ others. Recognizing the need for a personal investment in learning and in others emphasizes that leadership is not something done _to_ others, but rather a relationship that one enters into _with_ others. As much as what the leader does cannot be separated from who the leader is, learners cannot stand apart from their relationships with others. Learning and leading require a personal involvement with others.

Popular approaches present leadership as event-focused, episodic behaviors engaged in at a time and in a manner dictated by the situation. Some even speak of "leadershipping" as though leadership were a skill to be exercised much like planning or budgeting. This perspective comes from our tendency to put the microscope to leadership only when it seems most needed. Crises provide leaders with opportunities to take bold actions. We know that crises are more likely to give rise to charismatic leaders and leaders who are seen as transformational or visionary, in part because at these times followers see a heightened need for leadership and "sense making."[19] Many leaders seek out these opportunities to "be bold." Who leaders are and what leaders do may be most evident in times of crisis, but the opportunities for learning are not limited to organizational emergencies. Leaders of learning manage learning as an on-going organizational process, not an occasional, extraordinary event. They are _always_ looking for the learning-opportunity.

Leaders' manage learning with: 1) a focus on improving processes over proving performances; 2) an intensity of focus that is always greater than what is sufficient, but less than would be stressful or to the point of distress; 3) a processing of experience close enough in time to correct any problems; 4) an appreciation for individual differences as a means to clarify values. Each of these benchmarks for managing learning underscores the observation that leading learning is a full-time, full-service activity, not a some-time situational option which leaders may or may not exercise.

There is a belief shared by most leaders and all too many followers that the leader is infallible. The practical (political) corollary to this belief is, 'If the leader does do wrong, he or she should not be confronted with the fact'. Leaders who effectively monitor learning will put into place people and processes to generate valid feedback. One of the unintended consequences of effective re-engineering programs has been the revelation of the tremendous number of processes and procedures present in organizations, the purpose of which is to prove who or what is right. The majority of these exist at the privilege of leaders at all levels. Ostensibly monitoring mechanisms, these processes and procedures are more commonly used to promote the party-line and prompt conformity. The standard defense leaders proffer is, "I don't want to be surprised." The pragmatic translation is, "I don't want to be surprised with feedback which shows me to be wrong." Learning leaders are serious enough about learning to monitor learning in such a way

that all valid information is revealed and reflected upon, _even_ if it shows the leader to be wrong, _especially_ if it shows the leader to be wrong.

The presumption of leader infallibility presents a particular problem for today's "transformational" leaders. These leaders, by virtue of their compelling vision, their personal conviction and their persuasive communication skills, may foster an almost cult-like devotion from employees. Any questioning of the transformational leader's purpose, programs, or processes may be viewed by the leader and by the organization as disloyal. So strong is this feeling that many in these organizations engage in a kind of self-censorship, withholding critical feedback even when it would best serve the leader and the organization to be forthcoming. Leaders blessed with transformational skills must make a special effort to disabuse themselves and their followers of any semblance of leader infallibility. In a learning organization everyone acknowledges failures, their own, others', and those of the organization. And, because everyone can fail, everyone can learn.

The Lesson for Leaders

Over sixty years ago, Fritz Roethlisberger, conducting his legendary Hawthorne studies, observed that leaders are characterized by, "A willingness to accept new ideas and a desire to verify them by experience."[20] How can a leader's willingness and desire be discerned? To our mind, there are four simple tests: 1) Is the leader learning? 2) Is the leader involved? 3) Is the learning and leading constant? 4) Is it okay to say

the leader was wrong? The most effective leaders have always been and will always be learners. They lead their organizations by modeling, mentoring, managing, and monitoring learning. To come to this point, leaders at all levels and those engaged in leadership relationships must unlearn certain contemporary conventional ideas about who leaders are and what leaders do; they must unlearn the role of the leader, personal detachment, leadershipping, and leader infallibility.

Organizations cannot learn unless leaders are learners. The development of a learning organization must begin with development of individual learners who institutionalize learning processes in organizations which, in turn, promote learning communities and a learning society. This seemingly grand, even grandiose, scheme has implications for each of us. Each of us can act to learn and, in so doing, lead the learning of others, whatever our sphere of activity.

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