



The Advisory Alliance 60-Second Email™

Why You Should Know What Your Leaders Do. September 25, 2009

In this month's 60-Second Email™, we encourage you to forget about what leaders are, and strongly suggest you focus on what leaders do.

All great hockey players are ambitious and have a desire to win. Therefore, if I am ambitious and have a desire to win, I should become a great hockey player.

As silly as this sounds, versions of this logic arise in leadership development. Example: We study a select group of great leaders, see what attributes they have in common, and then make conclusions about which leadership attributes are required for anyone aspiring to be a great leader.

Hence, great leaders are thought to be: communicators, delegators, high achievers, coaches, team players, optimists, realists, visionaries, operators, servants, teachers, innovators, pragmatists, emotionally intelligent, self-aware, and so on and so on...

And the inference is that you should develop one / several / all of these attributes if you want to be a great leader too.

The problem with this sort of analysis is that:

- 1) It's backwards looking, and
- 2) It ignores the unique context and behavioral demands of *your* specific business or organization.

Regarding point 1, even if all great leaders are, let's say, emotionally intelligent, does that mean that all people who start off being emotionally intelligent will become great leaders? Will most become great leaders? How about a significant proportion? Can I therefore be truly confident assuming that if I develop my emotional intelligence, I will become a great leader?

Regarding point 2, leadership does not take place in a vacuum; it takes place in your unique business or organization that is a product of its history, culture, customers, employees, competitors, products, services, etc.



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Therefore, in order to be truly effective, leadership development must be rigorous in its focus on specific leadership behaviors as opposed to general leadership attributes: Focus on what your best leaders specifically do better than your average leaders to produce extraordinary results.

Attributes are important, but they must be translated into the specific behaviors that define leadership success in your organization. If I'm an aspiring leader in your firm, I don't want to know what I must *be*; I want to know what I must do to be a great leader. And the more specific you can make that for me, the better my chances at knowing what to do, and hence, at being able to do it.

Now more than ever, when companies expect and need so much more from their leaders and managers (and when there is so little margin for error in their leadership development initiatives), companies must examine how rigorous, specific, and unique their leadership development approach is. Looking backwards and highlighting general leadership attributes just won't work.

There's too much at stake.

You can access all of our 60-Second Emails (TM), including our most recent issue, "Do Your Leader Vacuums Need a Cleaning?" via this link:

<http://www.advisoryalliance.com/newsletter.php>

Love the game of hockey or have a comment on leadership development programs you've enjoyed or suffered through? Share your thoughts with our readers on our blog:

<http://www.advisoryalliance.com/blog>

Best regards,

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