



The Advisory Alliance 60-Second Email™

Leadership, Pornography, and A Visit to Justice Stewart

July 7, 2010

In this month's 60-Second Email™, do you know leadership when you see it?

Recently I was thinking about all the different definitions and descriptions people have for "leadership". I think the same thing could probably be said for "leader". If you ask 100 people to define either term, you're likely to get 100 idiosyncratic definitions, often with very differing perspectives. And I find that reality a bit troublesome. Not that I have the perfect answer, either.

Perhaps it's my desire for a bit more certainty, and less of an appetite for an "it depends" type of reality. And yet many times, I end up feeling like US Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart, who wrote:

"I shall not today attempt further to define the kinds of material I understand to be embraced within that shorthand description; and perhaps I could never succeed in intelligibly doing so. But I know it when I see it."

In this case, Justice Stewart was referring to pornography (not that there's a direct connection to leadership). Nonetheless, I think we can all relate to the "I'll know it when I see it" comment when it comes to defining leadership. And that's what I find a bit frustrating and yet also interesting.

We don't seem to have a problem in defining or getting general agreement on what is a dentist, a doctor, a lawyer, a teacher, a police officer, an architect, etc.

But ask people, "What is a leader?" and it's time to go to visit Justice Stewart.

And as much as I can tolerate the vagueness of it all, it does bother me that after all the pages and pages of articles, essays, and books written on leadership, and all the tweets, postings, blogs, etc. about leadership, we still seem to be in the fog somewhat.



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So here goes my attempt to strike a balance between precision and flexibility:

"Leadership is the sustained ability to achieve extraordinary results by engaging the collective efforts of others."

If you have something better, please let me know. And I mean that sincerely.

Better still, post it on our [blog](#).

If we get a sufficient quantity (share this with your friends, family, pets, and colleagues), I'll compile them, and share that too. So we all can know it when we see it.

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Again, what's your definition of "leadership"? Share your thoughts with readers on our [blog](#).

You can access all of our 60-Second Emails (TM), including the most recent issue, *Succession Planning, Part 2: Remaining Basic Steps*, via this [link](#).

Until next month,

**David**

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