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Leadership #1 An Elusive Art

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A Lack of Leadership

There are thousands of books on leadership. A recent search on Amazon.com listed over 9,835 titles in that subject category. Despite all these resources, most people complain that they continually experience a significant lack of effective leadership.

This is a critical problem. An organization's performance is highly dependent on the quality of its leadership. Because the vast majority of the goods and services we consume are provided through organizations, everyone interacts with a number of organizations every day. Rather than having an inspiring experience or feeling well served, many of us are regularly dissatisfied with our interactions with organizations, in large part due to the lack of good leadership.

There are many who would like to be effective leaders, but just don't know how. Unfortunately, those considered good and great leaders are often unable to coach others to also be good leaders. There is little agreement on the meaning of the term¹, making it even more difficult to make progress on improving it.

Some Questions

The purpose of the articles in the Leadership section is to bring clarity and a practical operational viewpoint to the practice of leadership. Some of the questions these articles will address are:

- What is an effective, operational, definition of leadership that will help someone become a good leader?
- What is the difference between leadership and management?
- Are leaders born, or can anyone learn to be a leader?
- What are the particular skills a leader should have and how can one acquire those skills?
- What are practical tips for being an effective leader?
- How can one mentor and coach someone to be an effective leader?
- How does a leader generate buy-in of potential followers?

¹ See "Breakthrough Leadership: It's Personal", *Harvard Business Review*, December 2001 Special Issue.



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- What are effective ways of quickly and seamlessly integrating a new employee into an organization?

- What are the characteristics of effective reward and recognition systems?
- What is the role of organizational values – are they goals to be accomplished, or a description of the current organization?

Summary

Despite leadership's critical importance to the effective functioning of organizations, and the critical role organizations play in our world, leadership remains an art and skill where excellence is rarely found. The series of articles in the Leadership section deliver perspectives that can assist those committed to being good - even great - leaders.