

Three key qualities of real leadership and how to get them

By Robert Steven Kaplan

The term "leadership" is widely discussed and frequently used. Ironically, if I did a survey of 100 chief executives and asked them to define the word leadership, I would typically get a wide variety of definitions.

Some would say leadership is about inspiring others.

Some might say it's about setting objectives and getting things done.

Many would say leadership really can't be taught or learned -- you've either got it or you don't.

Still others would say, "Forget about all that qualitative stuff, leadership is about producing results! If you're making money, you probably a good leader!"

Leadership is about acting in a way that adds value to someone else -- a community, a customer, a company, a country, a constituency etc.

The fact is, there is wide debate on what constitutes leadership and whether a mere mortal can learn to do it. At the same time, most people say they aspire to be leaders and/or say the country needs more leadership -- there's often talk about a "leadership crisis" and shortage of leaders.

With all this focus and debate, it is not hard to see why many executives are at least a little confused as to what they're supposed to *do* if they want to be a strong leader. Additionally, they're not quite sure whether this is something they're just born with or something they can learn.

I have spent the last several years trying to demystify this term and help people learn to be leaders.

To do this, I would first lay out my own definition. Leadership, as I define it, requires 3 key elements:

1. Can you figure out what you believe (and what you would do) if you were in charge? This is not about what the boss thinks, or others would like to see you do -- this is about, after careful thought and analysis, what do you believe. It's about getting to conviction.

Leaders can't always figure out what they believe but they are always striving to figure it out. This isn't about pointing out the flaws in others' actions; it's about going a step further and saying what actions you would take if you were the owner. This is challenging and leaders are constantly striving to get there.

2. Once you figure out what you believe (as if you were in charge), do you have the courage and skills to act on those beliefs? Lots of people can say what they might have done after a decision gets screwed up -- or say what they might have done after it's too late. Leaders act on their beliefs while there's time to take action.

Yes, they stick their necks out by speaking up or committing to a course of action (often by working through others). Of course, by doing this, they risk being wrong and being criticized for their actions. That's leadership.

3. Leadership involves doing numbers one and two in service of adding value to others.

Leadership is not about how to act in a way that helps just you. It is about acting in a way that adds value to someone else -- a community, a customer, a company, a country, a constituency etc.

For further details, you can visit the following site:

<http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2014/01/13/three-key-qualities-real-leadership-and-how-to-get-them/>.