

## ***The Issue of Leadership – A Very Short Presentation....***

*By John Leonard to the Age Group Chairs at USA-Swimming Convention, 2010 in Dallas, Texas.*

***Let's talk about leadership for a few minutes. What is it? How Do You Provide It? What do you do with it?***

First, my very personal definition of leadership is your ability to help your fellow human beings live a more fulfilling life. It's about what you can do for others, not what they can do for you. It's about serving other people. In my humble view, that's the meaning of life. We can all exhibit leadership traits and skills at various points in our lives. Sometimes we each lead, sometimes we each follow.

Leadership comes from 4 stages of Earned Leadership...first, you must be **competent** within the group at question. Second stage, once you prove competent, the next thing is that others must believe you **CARE** about them first, and not yourself. If you pass those first two tests, you will be watched, so now you are **leading by example**. If your actions set a good standard, then you will be granted the privilege **of leading by voice** and you have reached stage four. Thanks to George Block for teaching me about those four steps. They're good for all of life, not just leading in coaching.

Be careful. Once you lead by voice, you'll have every word and action scrutinized, and your credibility is all you have as a leader.

Ok, now you're leading. ***What do you do?***

First, **leaders help define the vision**. What does the group want to be? Do? Stand for?

Second, **leaders keep the group on task**. 75% by encouraging, 25% by enforcing.

Third, **leaders help their group SUCCEED**, by pointing out their strong points, skills and assets.

Fourth, **leaders measure and evaluate**...set standards and plan and re-plan.

Now, what **skills** are critical to leaders in doing those tasks?

First, you have to be able to **sell your ideas**. Sales skill is critical. It can be learned.

Second, you need to be able to **SIMPLIFY** and **JUSTIFY**. Have the skill to make complex problems understandable, clear and the way past them simple. (not to be confused with easy.) Have the ability to reduce an action to "JUST do this." Leaders can be **WRONG** and we'll forgive. Leaders cannot be **CONFUSING**. The leader has to be clear.

Third, you need to be able to **REFRAME** and **REFOCUS** the group. Inevitably, things will be harder than the group thinks. The Leaders job is to put it in perspective, look at the issue in a different way, and bring the group back to focus and hard work when they bounce off a problem. **Resiliency** is a great thing in any team. The Leader sets the tone for that. Fourth, we all follow people who can "**provide HOPE**". The leader says "we will triumph and this is how..." No effective leaders are grumpy pessimists. Leaders are optimists with a plan. Give the group **HOPE** and show them the way to victory and success.

Finally, the highest form of leadership is reached when the leader can become invisible and people appear to be "leading themselves". This of course, requires the oft-sought "**internal motivation**". In the book "DRIVE" by Daniel Pink, the author delineates three critical criteria for the development of Internal motivation. They are:

1. Autonomy – the person has (and/or appears to have) the ability to control their own destiny by their actions.
2. Mastery – the person has or perceives that they have, the ability to become very good at the task at hand. (If you think you can, you can...if you think you can't, you are also correct.)
3. A sense of belonging to something larger than oneself. (A TEAM thus is a perfect fit for this one.)

If the leader can help create a team of internally motivated individuals, the leader will be left with precious little to do...and that is what every leader should aspire to.

For swim coaches, I am reminded of a great line on life from Orinda Aquatic Club and Coach Don Heidary..”***Prepare the child for the path, don't prepare the path for the child.***”

Trust our young people. They can be strong, resilient competent, caring leaders who can lead by example and by voice, if given the chance to face the “slings and arrows of outrageous fate” by themselves.

Let's give them that chance every day.

Thanks for your work as leaders in your LSC every day. Good luck for your continued success.

Thank you.

John Leonard