

# ***LeaderPerfect Newsletter***

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## **The New Face of Leadership**

**by Dr. Mike Armour**

In our [prior newsletter](#) I discussed the kinds of leaders that people seek today. Fundamentally, we said, people want leaders who use their power and authority to promote the success of their people, both collectively and individually.

This style of leadership is a far cry from the authoritarianism of an earlier era. In this issue I want to talk about why this change has occurred.

Many factors have contributed. None has been more telling than rising education levels in the work place. Since the Second World War we have purposefully opened the doors of higher education to everyone. And not without cause. The technical and operational sophistication of the modern workplace puts a premium on an educated workforce. And in many lines of work, continuing education is both a requirement and a way of life.

By its very nature education ignites dreams, aspirations, and ambitions. It leaves people feeling that they have something significant to contribute. They are not content, therefore, to be treated as mindless cogs in a machine. They want to have input. They want to be heard. And they want to be appreciated.

### **Adjusting Leadership Styles to a Changed Workforce**

Service industries have only accelerated the need for a well-educated work force. Jobs in the service sector require brain-power, not brawn. Workers in service industries are best viewed as information brokers. They take data and information from one source, add value to it by applying their own knowledge, then pass the enhanced information to a third party, either an internal or an external customer.

Workers in jobs like these cannot be motivated, managed, or mobilized using the same methods that prevailed in the blue-collar heyday of low-tech manufacturing and construction. Workers in service industries quickly realize that their personal success depends on endless collaboration with colleagues, with experts, and with co-workers in their company. They therefore expect a management style that is similarly collaborative.

Does this mean that leadership has changed in a fundamental way?

No, not really. What is called for today are new *styles* of leadership, not a fundamental change in the *function* of leadership. Just as new styles of architecture do not transform the underlying function of a house, new styles of leadership do not change the underlying nature of leadership.

From written records we can trace the work of leaders over thousands of years. Whatever the century, leadership has always performed the same basic functions.

Yet leadership styles have varied widely, even in the ancient world. That's because effective leadership is always congruent with the culture and context within which it functions.

As a by-product of human progress, history routinely thrusts leaders into circumstances that mark a sharp break with the past. When this happens, leaders must adopt new styles of leadership if they are to be effective in the new context.

## **Leadership in the Face of Unprecedented Change**

That's what's happening today. With the emergence of the post-industrial economy, we have seen an extraordinary shift in the nature of the workplace. This shift is so sweeping that it has few historical precedents. Perhaps the only equivalent in Western history was the transition from the agrarian and feudal society of the Middle Ages to the urban and industrial society of the modern world.

With change of such magnitude, we would expect new leadership styles to arise, and so they have. It's no mere coincidence that the information age opened by introducing us to new leadership terms, such as "servant leadership," "transformational leadership," "participative leadership," and others.

What is common to most of these newer leadership styles is that they put as much emphasis on helping workers succeed as they do on helping the organization succeed. Or to put it more accurately, they share a common belief that we assure corporate success only by ensuring employee success. From this perspective, leaders contribute directly to the company's enduring success by developing, equipping, and empowering workers.

In the old days leaders tried to recruit successful people for key positions. They still do. But what impresses workers today is not so much the successful people whom a leader has hired, but the successful people whom the leader has developed.

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