



THE THREE “C’s” OF EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP Communication, Collaboration, Continuous Improvement

Could any of us actually estimate how many catch phrases and slogans have been invented to remind us about guidelines for effective leadership? Needless to say, the number would be daunting. If we slow down a bit and look at the realm called effective leadership, we might discover that most of those catch phrases and slogans were created after the fact. In other words, when effective leadership is demonstrated in action, the leader is often asked to reveal their “secret” but only after it is already evident that the leader is getting the job done effectively.

That was the case recently when a group of new supervisors, enrolled in a leadership development program, heard one of their senior leaders speak after a plant tour. She told the group that leadership was really a serendipitous phenomenon comprised of having the right person, with the right skills, in the right place with the right team. When asked by one of the group if she employed an easy way to keep herself on the right track, she was ready with her answer.

She said that she was always careful about over-simplifying a complex concept, but for her the “three C’s” usually helped her stay on track and navigate effectively. Here are her beacons for traversing the often rough seas of effective leadership:

Communication:

At Learning Dynamics, we never lose sight of the certain reality that it all starts and ends with effective communication. If effective leadership were a human body, then communication skills would be its DNA. Communication skills are the foundation of all leadership endeavors. We can peel the communication onion a bit with three sub-sets:

Content Clarity:

Does the leader say what she/he means? Is the message expressed so that it is compatible with the needs of the followers? Is there a readily available avenue for dialogue, questions, and clarifications?

Content Volume:

How much communication is enough? How much is too much? Is the flow of communication from the leader continuous and consistent? Is there readily available access to the communication from the leader, with an opportunity to respond, question and clarify?

Ethics, Honesty and Authenticity:

Do the followers believe the message? Do they feel that it is an honest expression from their leader, free of “spin” and vagueness? Can they trust the content of the message to aid them in their own decision-making? Does the message reassure them that they are in the right company?

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Collaboration:

There can be no leaders without followers. The presence of followers is what defines a leader. Collaboration can be seen as the measure of the utilization of skills, power, effort, ethics and creativity of the followers. Effective leaders know that they cannot do it alone.

At Learning Dynamics we are sometimes asked to assess the leadership capabilities of our clients. One of the first areas we look at is the degree of collaboration among employees within the company. We look first at collaboration within departments, and then between departments. We find that clients with effective leadership are far less likely to be infected with “silo thinking” and restrictive boundaries between departments and divisions.

When employees are expected to collaborate freely and fully among all of the resources both inside and outside the company, the potential for high performance is increased exponentially.

Continuous Improvement:

In his milestone book, *The Fifth Discipline*, Peter Senge builds a compelling argument that the only companies that will survive are the ones who learn faster than their competition. The concept of continuous improvement is not just a nice idea to have presented by leadership. It is an absolute requirement for sustained high performance.

A common denominator among all high performers, regardless of the endeavor, is the expectation that as a result of what they learned today, they'll be more effective tomorrow.

Too often, companies make the mistake of believing that continuous improvement is the exclusive realm of their research and development departments, or within their Six Sigma teams. While these functions are vital in the on-going discipline needed to formally improve products and processes, when the mindset flows freely throughout the whole organization to question, analyze and constantly refine every aspect of doing business, then we can tell that effective leadership is in place.

Effective leaders know that they themselves are far from “finished products.” They are consciously and publicly in the process of continuously improving, of strengthening areas of improvement, stretching their own capability, and mastering new skills. Leading by example, they can infuse the concept of continuous improvement throughout their organizations.

The Three C's aren't the be-all and end-all of effective leadership. They are valuable compass points to keep leaders on track. They represent a useful set of criteria for the measurement of effectively leading teams, departments or whole organizations.

