



I'LL FOLLOW YOU ANYWHERE

When You Learn How To Lead Me There

Gerry Riskin, who is undoubtedly one of the anointed few among clear thinkers, recently sent out a small video (<http://www.gerryriskin.com/law-firm-leadership-law-firm-leaders-heres-3-minutes-53-seconds-from-tom-peters.html>) of Tom Peters on the subject of leadership. It was an important piece, and certainly worth the few moments it takes to view it.

The subject of leadership is intriguing, obviously. There are a vast number of books on the subject, and people in all walks of life seem to spend more time and concern on the subject than on any other except, perhaps, religion and politics. There are, too, more definitions abounding than there are cherries on an abundant and fruitful cherry tree. This may be so because the simple definitions of the subject are so elusive that none really covers it. It's almost metaphysical.

We define things, I think, to better understand them. But in the case of leadership, we try to define the subject in order to learn how to become better leaders. I'm not sure that it works that way, if only because the qualities of leadership are so amorphous as to defy easy access to it.

Why? I think because the best definitions of leadership are like threads in a well knit sweater. The more you tug at the end of a thread, the greater grows the ball of wool – but the more diminished the sweater becomes.

After seeing and reading and hearing many, many definitions of leadership, I have determined that it all boils down to three things...

- Having a vision for the entity you lead
- Being able to articulate that vision
- Inspiring others to help you make that vision a reality

Now, that definition encompasses every other one I've heard, and it's absolutely true. But it's kind of dehydrated. To make it meaningful, you have to add water. You have to define the definition in all its aspects.

For example, to have a vision means understanding a great many things, both intellectually and emotionally, because visions don't happen in a vacuum. They are bred in an aura of a great many variables – the nature of the world, the nature of the entity to be led, the personality of the leader, and so forth.

Being able to articulate the vision is crucial, and requires communications skills. And the greater the skills the better the leadership. If you can't define it, how can you expect others to help you make it a reality?

Inspiring others to help you make the vision a reality is a function of not only communications skills, but an extraordinary personality, without which your communications skills are diminished. The personality factors are complex, and sometimes conflicting. For example, how do you reconcile the ego factor that drives so many leaders with the need to delegate?

And there, in a nutshell, is why trying to teach leadership to people who don't have the personality of a leader is such a growth industry.

You can use all the right words and concepts to try to meet these requirements. Teach people to listen. Teach them not to shout. Exhort them to lead by example. The Golden Rule sometimes helps.

In other words, the qualities of leadership are intangible. They are defined, not by books or lectures, but by the instincts and personalities of leaders. That's why there are so many leadership styles.

There's also the problem of dynamics. The world, and its people, and its needs and wishes, and its ideas, are constantly in flux. New ideas alter old ones, and random events alter circumstances. Thus, the better leaders must be able to adjust quickly, and so often today's leader may become tomorrow's followers. In business, for example, good leaders often fall from their pedestals. Which means, then, that good leadership is often transient, which makes it difficult to codify.

Don't misunderstand my position on this. I don't mean to put down the leadership books or the courses or even the MBA programs. What I'm saying is that among all the other things they teach about leadership and how to do it, nothing is more important than recognizing that the elements of a good leader are not only hard to delineate, but that they are intangible, and they are transient.

But the world needs good leaders, in every endeavor. So keep trying.