

can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with great talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.

-From a plaque on the wall of Ray Kroc

The difference between human organizations and other organisms is the central importance of the time dimension. In most natural systems, change occurs very slowly and is often measured in thousands of years. In human systems, change can occur very rapidly. As a result, nothing is more important to modern organizations than their effectiveness in coping with change. Whereas other organisms change as a result of natural selection, organizations change as a result of specific choices that they make themselves.

The leader's vision for the organization must be clear, attractive, and attainable. We tend to trust leaders who create these visions, since vision represents the context for shared beliefs in a common organizational purpose. The leader's positions must be clear. We tend to trust leaders when we know where they stand in relation to the organization and how they position the organization relative to their environment.

There are four main strategies that leaders choose (sometimes unwittingly) in order to position their organization:

1. Reactive.

With this approach, the organization waits for change and reacts - after the fact. Some leaders who operate in this fashion act through default. In other, possibly more effective cases, a reactive strategy is designed to keep options open and to provide the necessary flexibility: The

Rather than waiting for change to happen to them, leaders can develop effective forecasting

*great mystery of music
making requires real
friendship among those
who work together.*

stake each time he walked the tightrope - these leaders put all their energies into their task. They simply don't think about failure, don't even use the word, relying on such synonyms as "mistake," "glitch," "bungle," or countless others such as "false start," "mess," "hash," "bollix," "setback," and "error." Never FAILURE. One of them said during the course of an interview that "a mistake is just another way of doing things." Another said, "If I have an art form of leadership, it is to make as many mistakes as quickly as I can in order to learn."

Leaders Are Perpetual Learners

Learning is the essential fuel for the leader, the source of high-octane energy that keeps up the momentum by continually sparking new understanding, new ideas, and new challenges. If the leader is seen as an effective learner from the environment, others will emulate that model, much as a child emulates a parent or a student emulates a teacher.

While the leader provides the stimulus and focus for innovative learning, some organizations are learning-handicapped. They just seem to be so rigid and inflexible that nothing less than a major crisis can change them. That's the bad news. The good news is that leaders can redesign organizations to become more receptive to learning. They can do this by redesigning open organizations that are both participative and anticipative.

Individuals learn as part of their daily activities, particularly as they interact with each other and the outside world. Groups learn as their members cooperate to accomplish common goals. What the leader hopes to do is to unite the people in the organization into a "responsible community," a group of interdependent individuals who take responsibility for the success of the organization and its long-term survival. In doing so, leaders contribute to the competence of individuals and groups to manage complexity in their environment.

The Wallenda Factor

Shortly after Karl Wallenda fell to his death in 1978 (traversing a 75-foot high wire in downtown San Juan, Puerto Rico), his wife, also an aerialist, discussed that fateful San Juan walk, "perhaps his most dangerous." She recalled: "All Karl thought about for three straight months prior to it was falling. It was the first time he'd ever thought about that, and it seemed to me that he put all his energies into not falling rather than walking the tightrope." Mrs. Wallenda added that her husband even went so far as to personally supervise the installation of the tightrope, making certain that the guide wires were secure, "something he had never even thought of doing before."

From what we learned from the interviews with successful leaders, it became increasingly clear that when Karl Wallenda poured his energies into not falling rather than walking the tightrope, he was virtually destined to fall.

We're now at the point where we can bring together the two elements of the management of self into a unified theory. Basically, both positive self-regard and the Wallenda factor have to do with the outcomes. In the case of self-regard, the basic question is: how competent am I? Do I have the "right" stuff? The Wallenda factor is primarily concerned with one's perception with the outcome of the event.

The management of self is critical. Without it, leaders may do more harm than good. Creative deployment of self makes leading a deeply personal business. It's positive self-regard. The meaning of this phrase comes from responses to this standard question: "What are your major strengths and weaknesses?" For the most part, leaders emphasize their strengths and tend to minimize their weaknesses. Which is not to say that they weren't aware of personal weaknesses but rather that they did not harp on them. Good leaders always emphasize the positive - their best and the organization's best.

The Myths of Leadership

1. Leadership is a rare skill. Nothing can be further from the truth. While great leaders may be rare, everyone has leadership potential. More important, people may be leaders in one organization and have quite ordinary roles in another. The truth is that leadership opportunities are plentiful and within reach of most people.
2. Leaders are born, not made. Don't believe it. The truth is that major capacities and competencies of leadership can be learned, and we are all educable, at least if the basic desire to learn is there. This is not to suggest that it is easy to be a leader. There is no simple formula, no rigorous science, no cookbook that leads inexorably to successful leadership. Instead, it is deeply human process, full of trial and error, victories and defeats, timing and happenstance, intuition and insight.
3. Leaders are charismatic. Some are, most aren't. Charisma is the result of effective leadership, not the other way around, and that those who are good at it are granted a certain amount of respect and even awe by their followers, which increases the bond of attraction between them.
4. Leadership exists only at the top of the organization. In fact, the larger the organization, the more leadership roles it is likely to have.
5. The leaders controls, directs, prods, manipulates. This is perhaps the most damaging myth of all. Leadership is not so much the exercise of power itself as the empowerment of energies to the organization behind an attractive goal. Leaders lead by pulling rather than pushing; by inspiring rather than ordering; by enabling people to use their own initiative and experiences rather than by denying or constraining their experiences and actions.

Once these myths are cleared away, the question becomes not one of how to become a leader, but rather how to improve one's effectiveness at leadership - how to "take charge" of the leadership in an organization.

[Pervious](#) | [Next](#)