

## Secrets of Successful Leaders

By Debby Taber

Secretly, we all want to become the effective leaders that we are constantly reading about in articles and self-help books. As busy managers, we yearn to have other people tell us how well we lead our team through a difficult issue or project. But many of us find that it is an overwhelming task to incorporate and sustain inspiring leadership behaviors for very long. After all, isn't it easier just to tell people what to do? And besides, we've done it before, so we already know the best way to do everything!

Much like the weight reduction schemes we try to adopt each January, our good intentions don't seem to carry us far enough into the twenty-first day that experts say is required to change our eating - or our leadership behaviors. And yet, there are people around who have become effective leaders. So, let's examine how personal leadership change process can happen.

In my work as an organizational development consultant, I have found that there are two critical components that need to be initiated in concert with each other to start the process of achieving sustained leadership capabilities.

1. **Strategic Vision** – Managers fail to become leaders when they remain attached to the tactical problem solving aspects of the work under their control. Leadership is about getting others to produce superior work. **Leaders focus on developing a long-range vision and goals and then engage others in the process of understanding the vision and building an implementation plan to achieve it.** Leaders keep themselves focused on the horizon and engage others in dialogue to create and sustain a 'shared vision' for the group or the organization.
2. **Self-Awareness** – Most executives find that **self-awareness is the key emotional intelligence skill found in great leaders.** The information most needed is a candid assessment of your strengths and limitations from those people who are most critical to your success. Sometimes, executives turn to close friends or colleagues to help them understand their leadership issues. However, the most insightful and effective way to accomplish this is to engage in confidential, 360° feedback assessments from your boss, peers and direct reports. Leadership is all about relationships. So, your personal competence and leadership effectiveness is a function of how you manage your relationships with the individuals in these three groups.

Using an executive coach is an additional tool that many executives use to help them hone their leadership skills. **Based on the results of the 360° feedback report, the coach can help you understand how your current behaviors impact those around you.** With this information, you can build a personal development plan, focusing on those three or four leadership competencies that will help you grow as a leader and thus move the organization towards the vision.

Effective leaders are those people who possess the emotional intelligence skills to ask the powerful questions, challenge assumptions about current strategies and operations and risk losing the popular opinion of those around them. It is not easy to sustain this process alone. An executive coach can provide the guidance for dealing with real time problems in the workplace. **A coach gives you someone to talk to as you practice how to handle different situations and allows you to discuss what to do when your plan blows up in your face. It is the most effective way to 'try on' new leadership competencies and to learn from your actions.**

The simple truth is that leadership skills can be developed at any age as long as you have the desire and the right information as well as on-going guidance and support.